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## **Hard line**

New disability minister  
on welfare reform

## **David Bower**

Signed up to dance

£2.80 Issue 15

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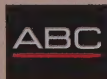
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# editorial

## UNConventional human rights

The Government has now given a clear indication that it will ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities early in 2009. This is in response to pressure put on it from disabled people and our allies, chiefly in the form of the UN Convention Campaign Coalition.

Although it's fair to say that to a considerable extent such pressure has been pushing at an open door – the Government's intention to ratify was never really in doubt – it's in the area of reservations where there is room for disappointment.

**“Is it really in the spirit of equality to deny all disabled people any access to the right to serve their country in any capacity?”**

The Coalition, supported by disabled people from outside it and by this magazine, lobbied hard for the Convention to be ratified with no reservations. And there was a time during the summer when it looked

as if those arguments might carry the day. Now it seems pretty certain that the Government will make three reservations. This means that it will exempt the United Kingdom from the obligation of complying with the demands for equal rights and treatment in these three areas.

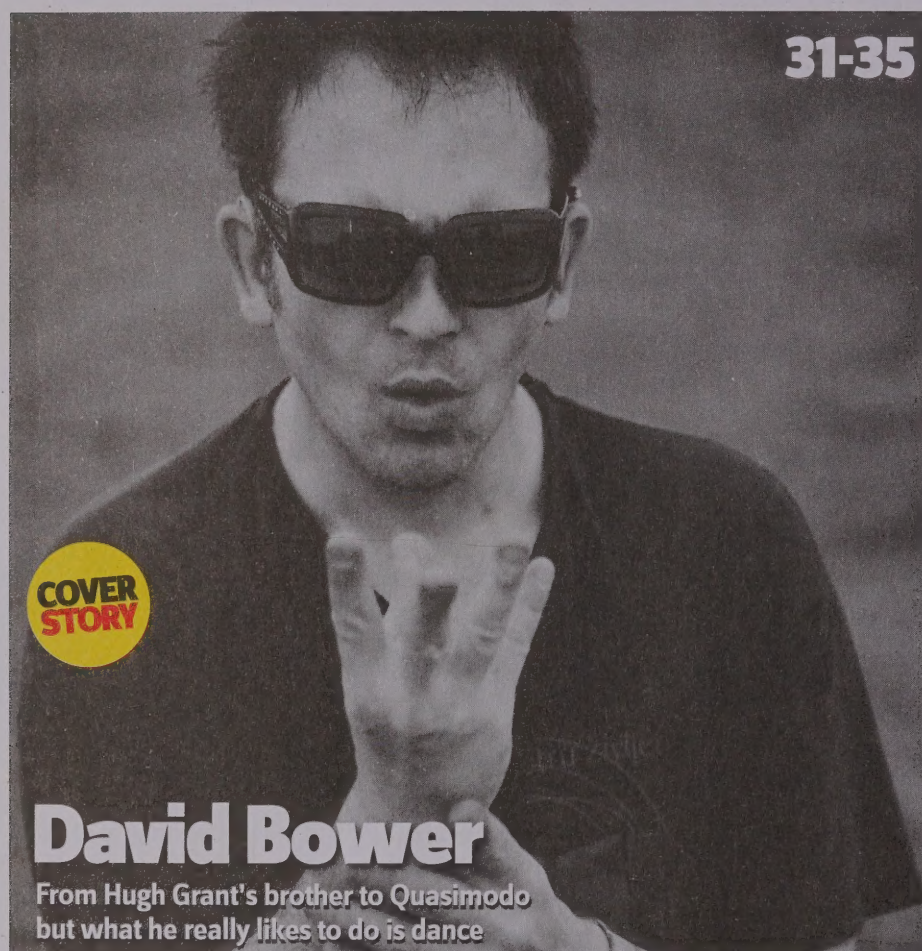
One reservation seems likely to be in respect of service in the armed forces. On the face of it, it would seem reasonable not to allow the possibility of, for example, a blind person being put in control of a Vulcan bomber in a combat situation. Nor would it be practical or realistic for a wheelchair user to be sent to fight in the mountainous terrain of Afghanistan. But is it really in the spirit of equality to deny all disabled people any access to the right to serve their country in any capacity? A visually impaired radio technician, for example, is not such a bizarre possibility; nor is there any impairment-related reason for a wheelchair user not working as an intelligence analyst.

The reservation must at least be open to question.



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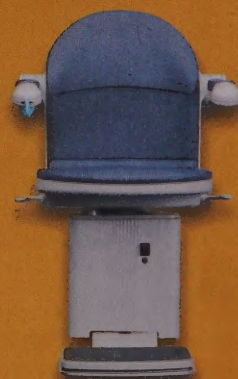
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# The Jade road to equality



**Sunil Peck**

Rowen Jade (pictured, above) is "thrilled" with her new role as chair of Equality 2025. She wanted to join the network because she believed passionately that equality by the year 2025 was a realistic goal.

Before joining the network, Jade campaigned for rights for young disabled people and also worked for several centres for independent living. A former member of the Direct Action Network, her first demo was at the ITV telethon.

But she has opted to turn her attention away from direct action to exploit the

opportunities that the government created by setting up Equality 2025.

"We are not a campaigning group; we do not hold a view on issues," she says. "We are a conduit to reflect the views that we hear and present them as a summary to government."

Jade says that Equality 2025 has achieved a lot since its inception in December 2006. It has been involved in discussions in key policy areas, including the development of the independent living strategy and the United Nations convention promoting human rights for disabled people.

**“As many disabled people as possible should give us their views. Our success is based on the amount and quality of engagement with disabled people throughout the UK”**

It has also heard a wide range of views from disabled people. One topic that has been "lively" at public meetings has been the government's welfare reforms. While some disabled people have told Jade that they want support

to move off benefit and into work, others say that the government should focus on improving education for disabled children. Equality 2025 has even heard from disabled people who see a life on benefits as an "easy ride" and have been opposed to any reforms.

Does Jade think that the Conservatives would disband the network if they won the next election? "There is always a natural fear of change. But as chair, I am working to embed us not only with the government but with civil servants. We are working very closely with civil servants who understand the value we can add for any policy development, no matter where that policy comes from."

Plans are afoot to enable more disabled people to engage with Equality 2025, including more public meetings and a website. Jade cannot emphasise enough how important she thinks it is for disabled people to take advantage of these opportunities so their views are fed to government.

"I would encourage as many disabled people as possible to give us their views. Without the views of disabled people, we have nothing to say. Our success is based on the amount and the quality of engagement with disabled people throughout the UK."



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## Harper slams Government for its 'wasted years'



**Cathy Reay**

Shadow minister for disabled people, Mark Harper (pictured, above) says that reports published by 11 secretaries of state show a government that is "letting down" disabled people.

The reports, published last month, highlight key government departments that have taken steps towards disability equality and pinpoint areas of policy that still need improving.

The reports are the first in

a series of planned progress updates of the government's aim of overall equality for disabled people by 2025.

Transport accessibility, more independent housing grants and a reduction in fuel poverty have all improved, according to the reports.

But the Office for Disability Issues' annual report, *Turning Equality into Reality*, published in conjunction with the secretaries of state reports,



states that between 2005 and 2008 the percentage of working-age disabled people who have never worked has increased from 7.8 to 8.4 per cent, broadly in line with non-disabled people. It adds that employment rates of disabled people have increased overall.

Speaking to *Disability Now*, Harper says the reports show a government that is "falling behind targets and letting down" disabled people.

He said of the reports: "With the prospect of a deep and long recession around the corner, it is interesting that they don't mention the wasted years when real welfare reform could have helped many disabled people into work."

Harper added that many

issues still needed to be addressed.

"The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities still hasn't been ratified, child poverty which affects many disabled children is rising, the Blue Badge Reform Strategy means higher application charges for disabled motorists, and the national roll-out of the Individual Budgets programme is proceeding at a snail's pace."

But disabled Labour MP Anne Begg (pictured, right) said: "It will take time for government sectors to realise all that they can do but they are becoming more aware of their obligations to disabled people. I hope that in three years' time when the next reports are released, we can see real progress has been made."

A government spokeswoman for the department for work and pensions said: "There has been considerable progress, such as the employment rate of disabled people, but more work needs to be done if we are to achieve our goal of equality by 2025."

Among the proposals for further changes are eliminating bullying of disabled schoolchildren, developing a more universally inclusive sports system and reducing water costs for vulnerable groups.



# newsroundup



## RADAR locates award winners

### Sunil Peck

Jonathan Naess has scooped the Person of the Year Award from RADAR for campaigning against the stigma surrounding mental illness.

RADAR's annual People of the Year Awards ceremony took place in London at the beginning of December and recognised activists and organisations for their contribution to achieving greater equality.

Naess, director of Stand

to Reason, was nominated for encouraging MPs, lawyers and city bankers to talk openly about their experiences of mental illness.

Later, he told *Disability Now* that he was "thrilled and delighted" with the award and added: "This is an honour because people with mental health issues do not always think of themselves as disabled and are not always aware that they are entitled to protection at work under the Disability Discrimination Act."

Albert Thomson won the Disabled Entrepreneur Award for setting up Action Amps, a company that employs amputees who participate in training simulations for emergency services and the military.

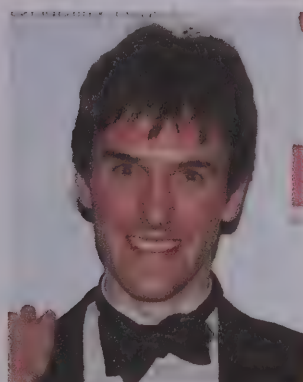
Sue Maynard Campbell, who died in 2008, won the Lifetime Achievement Award. She campaigned on issues including the right to life and greater access to the health service. (Her award was collected on her behalf by her sister Alice.)

The Young Person's

Award was won by Ben Fletcher for his work making information technology more accessible. He has Ushers syndrome and works for IBM.

Other winners included NHS Highland and Highland Council which won the Public Sector Award for promoting the right to personal relationships for people with learning difficulties; the television series *Britain's Missing Top Model* (pictured, above), which





**Clockwise from top left:** Jonathan Naess; Albert Thomson; Ben Fletcher; Tommy Jessop and Alice Maynard

won the Media Award for Factual Programming; the BBC1 film *Coming Down The Mountain* starring Tommy Jessop (above, right), which won the Media Award for Fictional Programming; and Lloyds TSB which won the Business Award for its work on integrating disability equality in customer service and employment.

Nathan Giles was highly commended by judges at



the ceremony for his work carried out into expanding rights for disabled children. His work, undertaken when he was 12 years old, was commended for the influence it has had on UK government policy.

## Disabled staff more likely to be bullied in the workplace

A survey conducted jointly by Cardiff University and the Univeristy of Glamorgan found that disabled people are more likely to face bullying and harassment at work.

The survey, based on interviews with 4,000 people and carried out for the Equality and Human Rights Commission, found that 22.5 per cent of those interviewed had been subjected to persistent and unfair criticism of their work.

This compared with 13.5 per cent for non-disabled people.

Some 11.6 per cent of disabled people also claimed to have suffered physical violence, more than double the percentage figure for non-disabled people.

## Rights act's untapped potential

The British Institute of Human Rights published a report highlighting the untapped potential of the Human Rights Act to improve the lives of disabled people.

In the report, published to mark the tenth anniversary of the act, 16 cases were highlighted of where the

act had been used to protect people's rights.

One featured the case of a disabled man who used the act to challenge a decision that he could not have a support worker with him in a gay pub.

In another case, a couple with learning difficulties used the act to stop CCTV cameras being placed in their bedroom as a way of assessing their parenting skills.

## MP calls for more disabled grassroots involvement

The disabled Labour MP Anne Begg welcomed a parliamentary enquiry into ways of improving the representation of disabled people at Westminster.

She also called on disabled people to become involved in local politics at a more grassroots level.

She said, "If they are not involved in becoming councillors, or doing community or voluntary work, they will not have a track record when it comes to fighting parliamentary seats."

She said she believes that there are more disabled MPs than many people think, as some with hidden impairments do not talk about or declare them in public.



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# campaigns



Alistair Darling's Pre-Budget Report contained some good news for disabled people, but it could have been so much better, says **Ruth Patrick**

**C**hancellor Alistair Darling stands up to deliver his pre-budget report. After the usual rhetoric about extraordinary times calling for extraordinary measures, he announces a massive spending programme to help boost the economy – targeted on making public places truly accessible for all disabled people. He also introduces the extension of winter fuel payments to all disabled people in receipt of benefits. These measures, he argues, will help lift Britain out of recession while improving disabled people's quality of life.

And then I woke up! Although Darling did not introduce any of my dreamt-of reforms, his pre-budget report (PBR) has

been proclaimed as radical and redistributive, with help targeted at those who need it most.

The headline measures include a temporary reduction in VAT from 17.5 per cent to 15 per cent, an increase in personal tax allowances to help the lowest paid, and a £3 billion public spending programme designed to kickstart the economy. Equally important, Darling committed the government to a new 45 per cent tax band for all those earning over £150,000.

The PBR has been cautiously welcomed by many, who see in it Labour at last returning to its roots: taxing the rich to help the poor. But how will it affect disabled people in Britain today, who are dispropor-

tionately likely to be in poverty, and if in work, are often among the lowest paid? Undoubtedly, the increased personal tax allowance will help those on low wages, while the VAT cut will enable those disabled people living on tight budgets to stretch their money a little further. However, the poorest spend most of their money on food and energy bills, neither of which are affected by the VAT changes.

One piece of good news for all those claiming the main disability benefits is the £60 Christmas bonus, which will be paid out this month. However, this one-off payment seems rather tokenistic, given that disability benefit rates remain unchanged. Another announcement which should

be greeted with muted cheers is the extra £100m allocated for the Warm Front programme. This provides invaluable grants of up to £2,700 for vulnerable and low-income households – including disabled people on certain benefits – to improve insulation and energy efficiency in their homes.

Although there are measures to be welcomed, the government could have gone much further. Substantive increases in the main welfare benefits would have been a good place to start, while the spending power of the lowest paid could have been enhanced by cutting the basic income tax rate, even temporarily.

In essence, though, the PBR was about needing to take immediate action to ensure the current downturn does not endure too long. The coming months will show whether these tax cuts and spending increases can flip the economy from recession to recovery. Each of us should cross our fingers, as recessions are bad news for us all, disabled and non-disabled alike.

• Ruth Patrick is a disabled academic who specialises in welfare-to-work and disability benefits

## → Have your say

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# politics

## Gaining access to the seat of power

A Canterbury councillor's successful application to access to work brings hope to other disabled would-be local elected members, reports **Cathy Reay**

**A** disabled councillor has helped bring about a "seismic shift" that will help other disabled people enter local politics.

Jo Calvert-Mindell (pictured), a Liberal Democrat, became so frustrated by attempts to secure an ergonomic chair from Canterbury City Council for use in council meetings that she asked for funding from the Access to Work scheme.

But government advisers told her local councillors were not eligible for Access to Work funding because they had no employment contract.

Liberal Democrat peer Baroness [Ros] Scott took up the matter on her behalf and asked the government to clarify the issue.

Lord McKenzie, the junior work and pensions minister, confirmed in the Lords that elected officials who only receive payment for expenses such as travel are treated as voluntary workers and are therefore not eligible for Access to Work funds.

But he added that councillors whose council allowances are classed as "taxable income" (which includes all those in Scotland) may be eligible for payments.

He said the government would review its guidance to Access to Work advisers to "ensure it is clear".

Cllr Calvert-Mindell said afterwards: "This is a great step forward and will pave the way for anyone in the community who is minded to become a councillor without fear of their disability being a barrier."

On the other hand, she still feels "humiliated" and "disempowered" by the way the council asked her to justify needing her chair.

In an email, the council had written: "They are expensive chairs, so a few lines from you about your need for a chair and how it will enable you to do your job will be helpful in making that decision." (A council spokesman later said that the council "strongly refutes" any suggestion that it was reluctant to provide the chair.)



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Cllr Calvert-Mindell says she also felt unable to ask for an assistant to drive her to meetings. "Why should the public who elected me be disadvantaged?"

In spite of that, Marie Pye, a disabled councillor with Waltham Forest council in London and a former head of policy at the Disability Rights Commission, said the change presented a "huge seismic shift". "I don't like

asking my council for money for adjustments because I know budgets are tight, so most of the time I don't ask. Hopefully, more disabled people will come forward as councillors as a result of this."

Dr Michael Bruton, a wheelchair-user and former councillor for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, added: "It is great that someone has done something to clear this up."

### → Have your say

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- email us [editor@disabilitynow.org.uk](mailto:editor@disabilitynow.org.uk)
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# mediawatch

## Don't just grin and bear it

In the 1990s, action by disabled people helped to bring about the end of ITV's Telethon appeal. Now activist **Richard Downes** says it's time for that spirit to be rekindled in pursuit of a different quarry



One day I was lazily browsing Facebook when a distant friend, disability activist and artist Clair Lewis, sent a picture that really tickled me. Pudsey Bear with a bleeding bullet hole in his cheek, a gun pointed at his head and the slogan "I Shot Pudsey Bear".

The months passed and the BBC started to promote the wounded bear again. Pudsey was everywhere again. Clair sent a message: "Resist! Do something!" I looked at the picture and wondered what

would happen if we all shot Pudsey. And so it was that the *We All Shot Pudsey Bear Facebook Group* was bought into the world.

Basic information states: "Members of this group wish to see the back of Pudsey Bear. Members wish to see a government really committed to the rights of disabled people and a public that takes responsibility rather than chips in to yet another telethon." The challenge was laid down.

Articles started appearing on the group about the

history of disabled people's resistance to telethons, the public was being asked what it was doing, Pudsey was being sighted and shot down by wit and repartee, and disabled people's activism received a much-needed injection.

We started a Burn Pudsey Friday event coinciding with Children in Need. We held our own indoor and

outdoor events. We took pictures and videos of Pudsey going up in flames. We sent in our reports and made up stories. We heard from activists about what they had done or would be doing, of a picture or video that was on the way. The group went on growing. New activists, their imagination captured, were doing something for the first time. Disabled activists were linked to an action by the net.

Is Pudsey a mythological creature, an embracer of children, a tragic cove, a god – tattered, torn and like the Norse god Balder, blind? He is said to bring joy and his charity is munificent. But activists see behind the blindfold. They know that he is there to be fondled by unctuous celebs, unwittingly demonstrating their complete failure to engage with real issues.

Some disabled people started shouting a long time back and now the chants are being heard again: "Rights Not Charity", "Piss On Pity". Participate. Get involved. Join *We All Shot Pudsey Bear*.

• For more information visit [www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=46564848880](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=46564848880)

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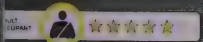


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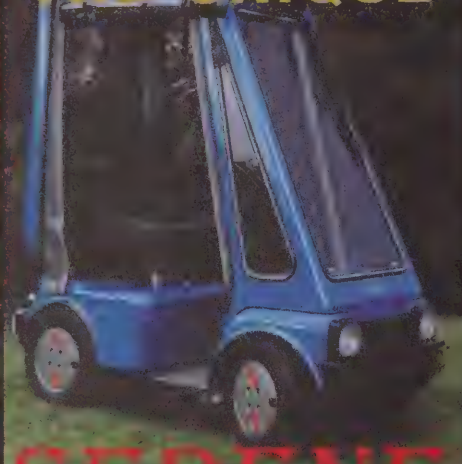
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# disabilityrights

## Europe thinks local on rights

**Paul Carter** reports from an EU conference that set out to get right down to local issues

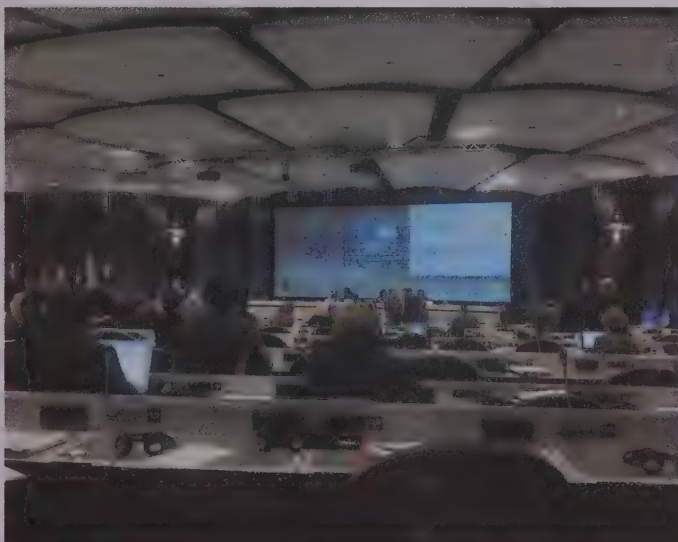
**A**t the Charlemagne Conference Centre in Brussels, representatives of governments, disabled people's organisations and charities from across Europe gathered for a conference organised by the European Commission to mark the 2008 European Day of People with Disabilities.

The theme for the conference was "Acting Locally for a Society for All", and focused on how actions made at a European level can and should have a direct impact on real people "on the ground" in the 27 member states.

The keynote speaker was Yannis Vardakastanis, President of the European Disability Forum.

He urged those present from member state governments to bear in mind that their decisions, though seemingly distant, can have a real impact on the lives of all disabled people.

He said: "The local level is where people with disabilities live, where people with disabilities work, and the need is there to make local societies



**Inside the Charlemagne Conference Centre in Brussels**

accessible and open to all to be able to exercise fully their rights."

**“The empowerment of organisations of people with disabilities, we believe is the obligation of governments and authorities”**

Mr Vardakastanis also said that sticking to the concept of "nothing about disabled people without disabled people" was vital for both the future success of European policy in general

and any meaningful implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

"The empowerment of organisations of people with disabilities, we believe, is the obligation of governments and authorities, starting from the local level to the national and right up to the European, so the involvement of disabled people is indispensable for a successful implementation of the convention," he said.

Representing Great Britain as a speaker was Richard Howitt, Labour MEP for the East of

England, who spent several years working for a disabled people's organisation in London.

He said, "One of the tests, when we do all the work we do at the European level, is whether one of those disabled people with whom I used to work will be trapped in their beds for the day or whether their home carer or nurse will forget to turn up to get them out of bed.

"That's a hard test, but it's the only test if we are really to change lives and tear down the walls of discrimination, as far as disabled people are concerned."

He also called for "swift ratification" of the convention by all EU member states, "including the optional protocol and without, or with very few, reservations on the text."

He said: "As a loyal member of the governing party of the UK, that does not prevent me from calling on my own British Labour government colleagues also to do that, including the optional protocol in public before you today."



# worldview



Salam Tallb had to flee Iraq after an attempt on his life. But, he says, he was determined not to give up on his fellow disabled Iraqis.

DAHR JAMAIL

**F**or 30 years, I never felt blessed to have a disability in Iraq, but life can change in a moment.

"Step out of the car, motherfucker!"

My car had been stopped at a US military checkpoint in Baghdad, in December, 2003. Although my English was good enough by then, I did not feel like speaking English. It is hard to feel that in order to survive in your own country you have to speak in a foreign language.

So I did not respond. And I did not move, because I

was afraid that if I bent forward for my crutches, the soldiers would think I was reaching for a weapon.

Their translator rushed over when he heard the soldiers repeating their orders, louder and louder. "He is injured in his leg," he said.

The soldier opened the car door and threw me to the ground, stepping on my head and shouting: "Where did you get injured? You were fighting us!"

The other soldiers gathered around, pointing their guns at me, while I tried to tell them I had polio

when I was one.

Eventually, they let me go. My disability had saved me a long trip through the "US military justice system". The journey begins with detention in a one metre box in Camp Victory at Baghdad Airport. From there, the path splits – either to Abu Ghraib Prison down the road, or to Buka, the southern jail in Basra. Detainees have no access to a lawyer and no trial – it might take several years before they realise you are innocent.

This is the story of more than 30,000 people

being held in American prisons in Iraq.

To be honest, there were certain privileges if you were disabled under the Saddam regime. Disability was not considered desirable by the Iraqi military recruiters or the ruling Baath Party. This caused many Iraqis to shoot themselves so they could avoid service during the Iraq-Iran war. These "draft dodgers" were choosing to live as disabled people rather than be sent to the front lines of a battle that would likely lead to their deaths.

But there were also many



challenges for disabled people.

The concept of "wheelchair accessible" construction was non-existent. The Baghdad University campus was a "pedestrian zone", but the parking lot was a mile from the nearest classrooms, most of which were on the third or fourth floor of buildings without elevators.

As the only disabled student out of 10,000, I took all this as a challenge.

I was drawn to engineering. Engineers, after all, can adapt the environment to open incredible possibilities for disabled people. I pursued degrees in computer science and engineering, always with the idea of practical applications.

The obstacles facing disabled people were compounded in 1991 when, led by the US, the international community imposed sanctions on Iraq. In some ways this was an equaliser because now everyone was made to live under impossible conditions.

For the next 13 years, Iraq was not allowed to import food and medical supplies. Inflation rose so high that it became difficult for people to balance the rising cost of living with dwindling incomes.

Many disabled people had to sell cigarettes on Baghdad's streets to supplement their families' meagre incomes.



**Above, Salam interviews American soldiers while researching a story at the Al-Yarmuk hospital. Opposite page, American soldiers in Baghdad in 2004 had threatened to crush Salam's car if he didn't move it**

The fall of the Saddam regime in 2003 did not improve living conditions for disabled people. Selling cigarettes on the street

### **Iraq's disabled population have the capacity to rebuild their lives**

suddenly became dangerous. The threats of being robbed, laughed at, or ignored, were replaced with the risks of getting caught in the crossfire of a street fight, sitting next to a car that might explode, or being a victim of militia attacks against the US military.

For every Iraqi who has been killed, probably at least ten have been injured. Most of these survivors now have permanent disabilities. At the Al-Yarmuk Teaching Hospital in Baghdad, after a car bomb had gone off, one doctor told

me he had amputated five patients' legs; these surgeries would not have been necessary if the hospital had proper medical equipment, basic sanitation in operating rooms, sufficient staffing, and effective medicines.

As for me, I began working for non-profit organisations, became a journalist and continued working as a computer engineer. But the situation became increasingly dangerous. Americans became the chief targets for assassinations, kidnappings and random violence. Iraqis working with foreigners, even those working for humanitarian non-governmental organisations, like myself, put themselves at higher risk.

After an attempt on my life, I was forced to leave. But I had nowhere to go. I just fled. After many months waiting in Jordan, I

received a US visa. I finally secured asylum this year.

Now outside, looking in, I watch as five years of being occupied by a foreign military, constant violence, unemployment, and an impoverished civil society are leading the country down a road of grief and despair.

It was difficult to sit back and watch without trying to do something to help the country I love.

I remembered when I received my first wheelchair, generously sent to me from Germany. It played a great role in shaping the person I am today. So I decided to try to establish a wheelchair factory in Iraq, run by disabled Iraqis.

More groups became involved, including the Whirlwind Wheelchair Institute and the Joint Iraqi Development and Unity Foundation.

We have now sent a shipment of Whirlwind wheelchairs to Iraq, hoping to learn more about the situation there. We hope the project will expand as more people are trained in wheelchair design.

Iraq's disabled people have the capacity to rebuild their lives. Years of shattered hopes and destroyed dreams will not vanish overnight. But a simple message of recognition and decency in the place where humanity began is worth a spin.



# onetowatch

## Signing and singing

Andrew Thomson (pictured, right, with Stelios Haji-Ioannou) is the winner of this year's Stelios Award for disabled entrepreneurs. He's founder and director of an online BSL/English interpreter service, [www.sign-now.com](http://www.sign-now.com). In answering our questions, he says he'd like to hear – but only for a day.

### What's the best thing about being Deaf?

Ummm....sorry, can you repeat the question? Oh yes, silence is golden!!

### What makes you angry?

Hearing people thinking they know what's best for Deaf people without asking our opinion to make sure they're right.

### What's the funniest thing anyone's ever said to you about your impairment and have you any good put-downs?

People often complain about noise, and once at a residents' meeting they were protesting about the noise from machinery being used near their houses. One man turned to me and said he'd been wakened very early in the morning and hadn't I been disturbed too? "No", I quipped, "I didn't hear a thing..."

### If you were Prime Minister, what one thing would you do to improve things for Deaf and disabled people?

I would create the position of "Disability Tsar" whose job would be to ensure monies are well spent for Deaf and disabled people. They would achieve this through proper consultation with deaf and disabled people, i.e. those who know best what they need, as too much money has been spent in the past without doing this and opportunities for investing in and improving Deaf and disabled peoples' lives have been wasted.

### What's the one thing that could be invented to make your life easier?

Hologram interpreters!



### What do you most like about your work?

Meeting people with little knowledge about the Deaf community and taking up the challenge to educate them one by one, every single day.

### And what do you not like?

Being scoffed at when I say I'm an entrepreneur.

### Do you have any secret skills other than those associated with your work?

I sing to my sons!

### If you didn't have your own impairment, which other impairment would you like to have?

I'd spend a day as a hearing person, just to find out what all the fuss is about!

### → Who do you think is One to Watch?

Send us your nominations for likely lads and lasses to answer our questions. They can be rising stars in any field of entertainment, business, the media or beyond

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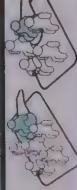
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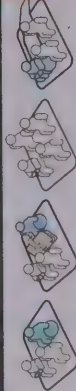


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# Holding the line

Jonathan Shaw, the new minister for disabled people, says he wants to be judged on what he does, not on what he's done in the past. **Sunil Peck** starts the judging

**T**he UK is heading for the most severe economic downturn since the early 1980s, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Unemployment, it says, is likely to rise to more than eight per cent by the end of 2009.

But Jonathan Shaw, the new

minister for disabled people, is holding the government line on incapacity benefit reform, even though disabled activists continue to challenge it and businesses are going to the wall every day.

Shaw says he is determined to help more disabled people find work and insists there are "tens of thousands" of jobs unfilled, even though he

accepts unemployment is rising.

Campaigners fear the government's welfare reforms, which include private companies being paid according to the number of disabled people they find work for, will create an incentive for giving the most support to people with fewer support needs, or that people will feel forced to take up unsuitable jobs for fear of losing their benefits.

Shaw insists that benefits will not be taken away if people have problems finding work during an economic downturn. He rules out a return to the policy of the 1980s when unemployed disabled people were placed on incapacity benefit and, as he puts it, "forgotten about".

"I was speaking to some people just recently about North Lanarkshire Council, which has been very successful in getting disabled people into work, and they launched their programme when the Ravenscraig steelworks closed. They still were able to get more disabled people into work."

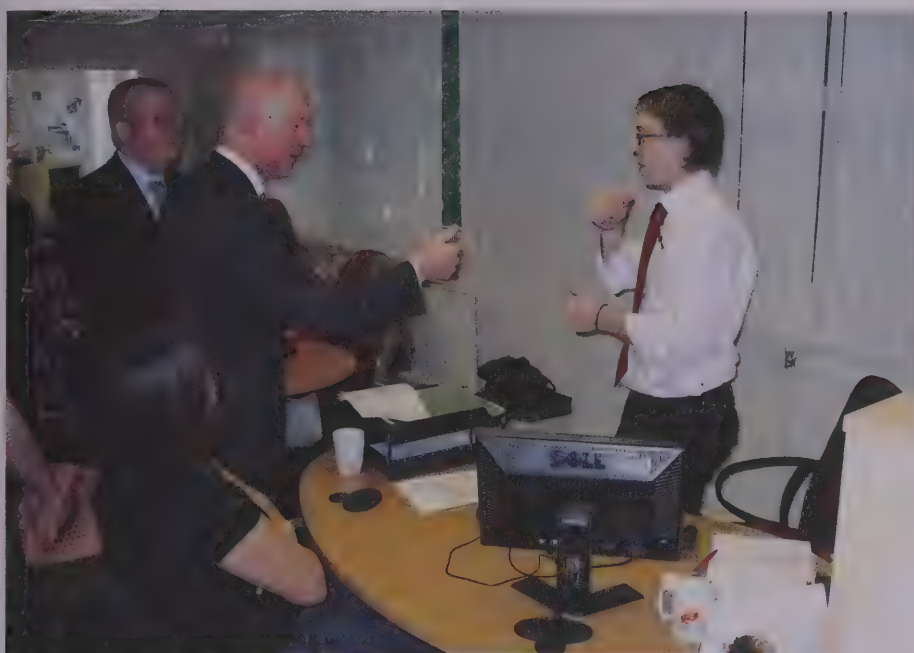
But Shaw does acknowledge that the government has not done enough to help disabled people with higher support needs find work.

"One of the key tests of our reforms and programmes will be getting people with fluctuating conditions into work," he says, and mentions a pilot scheme the government is developing with Mind.

The government, he says, has doubled Access to Work funding and introduced the Employability programme to promote the benefits of employing disabled people to employers. He also says that he regularly meets business leaders as minister for the south east, so he can evangelise about the benefits of employing disabled people to key figures.

"I cannot express enough how resolute I am in the belief that we do not





**The minister with Deaf and hard of hearing people at Derring Employment Services**

now divert from our course. There will be no let up in promoting the cause of getting disabled people work," he says.

Shaw, MP for Chatham and Aylesford, was previously a minister in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. He is a former social worker and was also a support worker for adults with learning difficulties. So how will his experience of working with disabled people influence how he approaches his new brief?

"Any experience that is relevant to a job that you do in government is of benefit. I was a support worker for a number of years in residential homes and so I have been very much at the coal face in terms of supporting [disabled] people so yes, that is of value. But I will be judged not on what I have done, I will be judged on what I do."

As well as tackling unemployment, Shaw says it is essential to take power from the state and allow disabled people to make informed choices about their care and support.

A couple of days before our meeting, he announced that disabled people would be involved in monitoring the roll-out of the government's independent living strategy – an announcement that was welcomed by campaigners such as Baroness (Jane) Campbell – and he tells

me they will also have a role in influencing the development of key policy areas, such as transport.

But although the government has made progress towards empowering disabled people, activists have questioned its failure to commit to ratifying in full the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Why, they ask, is the government dithering when other countries have already ratified the convention?

Shaw blames the delay on how long it has taken government departments to examine the implications of the convention on existing laws, and says there is still an "enormous gap" between the aspirations of the convention and the reality of what it would mean.

He says the UK will ratify this spring, but is likely to opt out of several areas. The most contentious opt out is probably the commitment to phasing out special schools and developing a fully inclusive education system.

Campaigners say there is no need for an opt out because the convention does not set a time limit on when special schools should be abolished.

Shaw points out that the government has reduced the number of special schools since 1997, but still

defends them as an important part of the education system.

"At the moment we have special schools and they are the choice of many parents for their children. There are fewer than there were, but the children's department believes that they are a necessary part of the provision we offer to parents."

When pressed on whether he would be happy for his own children to be sent to school hundreds of miles away, Shaw refuses to answer "personal questions". But he reiterates his belief that parents should have a choice about where their disabled children are educated.

He also repeats the government line that there are no plans to extend winter fuel payments to severely disabled people under 60, despite government figures that show nearly 100,000 households containing a disabled person where more than ten per cent of income is spent on fuel.

"Bluntly, we do what we can within the resources that we have. We did announce in the Pre-Budget Report that there would be additional allowances this winter for many people in receipt of disability benefits, including carers."

Where does Shaw stand on disabled people's frustrations at the failure of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to campaign for disability rights as vociferously as the Disability Rights Commission did?

He concedes that it has taken time for the EHRC to find its feet. But he says a report on the bullying of disabled people in the workplace is an example of its valuable work.

"Work is such an important part of the agenda for disabled people. We want people to stay in work and to work in an environment where they can develop their careers, not one where they are bullied." ■



# Fervour education

The schools that activists now condemn may have been the very places that gave birth to the disability movement they now belong to. **Paul Carter** asks three leading activists about the role of special schools

One issue that still has the ability to polarise opinion among many disabled people is the education of disabled children. It remains a hot potato, as is clearly shown by recent concern over the government's decision to reserve on the issue of specials schools in ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

Despite the many fervent arguments put forward by both camps, one only has to take a cursory glance at the leading figures in the disability movement to see that many, if not all of them, came from a special school background.



JAMIE TROUNCE

As the former chair of the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), and now the government's "commissioner for the compact", Bert Massie (*pictured, below*) has been at the forefront of disability campaigning for many years.

He attended Hereward College, based in Coventry in Warwickshire. What is his opinion of the idea that segregated education breeds campaigners by fostering a sense of community and identity among young disabled people?

"It's an interesting thesis, isn't it?" he says. "The thing is, we don't actually know what makes a campaigner. You can't say it is just because of special schools, because I know lots of people who went to special schools who would have nothing to do with campaigning or activism."

Actress and disability rights campaigner Julie Fernandez (*pictured, above*) attended Treloar School and College, which she describes as an "amazing school" that "fostered a huge amount of confidence and awareness in each of us as a disabled person".

But she says she saw little evidence of this identity directly steering people into the disability rights movement.

"We didn't really think about campaigning or activism," she says.



JOHN PRIING

"You concentrated on your education, and then you went off to do what you wanted, whether that was university or employment or whatever."

Despite this, she believes that the special school education she received helped, if indirectly, to further the disability agenda.

She says: "Treloar's confidence in me and my confidence in them, along with them pushing me to go out and achieve, has allowed me to go out and be what I am and do what I have done and achieved in my career."

Tara Flood (*pictured, opposite page*), director of the Alliance for Inclusive Education (Allfie), is a self-proclaimed





“survivor” of the special school system. She says that a sense of activism and campaigning was fostered in spite of a segregated education rather than because of it.

“I think there is a direct connection but I don’t think it’s about the identity and awareness issue: I think that it’s people’s later reaction to it.

“It’s often later on in life when people realise what is happening. Where the change in identity and awareness happens is when you hear about the social model [of disability], which is what gives you a context for why you feel the way you did. That’s certainly why I can say I feel the way I feel.

“Also it’s generational,” she says. “A lot of people who are campaigners now were at school when the default position for disabled people was special schools.”

Does she think that this will mean there will be fewer “up and coming” young disabled activists as inclusive

education becomes more commonplace?

“I don’t think that’s likely,” she says. “However, disabled people who have been included in mainstream life as young people often get angry about wider equality issues.”

Sir Bert Massie agrees that it was factors outside the education system that fired people’s activism.

“When I got involved in the 60s, it was because we as disabled people were angry,” he explains.

“We couldn’t get into cinemas, we couldn’t get into shops and we couldn’t get into Wimpy bars, all because of ‘fire risks’. There was no accessible transport, you couldn’t get on buses and on trains you had to travel in a freezing cold guard’s van. We struggled to get into employment and wherever we went there were barriers – really overt, aggressive barriers. We wanted to get rid of that and that’s why we’re in the world we’re in today.”

He does feel that some “would-be”

campaigners are less motivated because of the great strides already made by those who came through the special school system before them.

“It could be that some disabled people are now getting jobs, they’re getting married, and when they get home, they want to do what everyone else does, and flop in front of *EastEnders*.”

Some feel that the decline in special schools may mean that grass-roots activism arises from new and alternative areas, such as the increasingly influential disability arts scene.

Others point to the fact that people are now campaigning on wider issues, while many impairment groups such as those with learning difficulties, or from the Deaf community, now have a much greater collective voice.

“In my day you joined an organisation and you fought through that,” says Massie. “You progressed through their committee structure and made your name that way. Now, we do ➔



see a new generation of activists coming through and doing things differently. Take Rowen [Jade] for example, the new chair of Disability 2025. There's also the disability arts scene and all the umbrella organisations.

"However, I am concerned – it does worry me. I'm on committees and I still see people who I've known for 30 years now."

One area of consensus on where all schools, inclusive and non-inclusive, could do more to cultivate activism and raise awareness is through the teaching of disability history and culture to young people.

Flood says: "Young people today are angered by a lot of mainstream issues now. What we need to do is make sure disabled people know about what has

happened before. This is a massive opportunity to get our history onto the curriculum for all young people, not just disabled people."

Fernandez says: "I think that with

**When I got involved in the 60s, it was because we as disabled people were angry**

the increase in mainstreaming, the educational establishment should ensure that all schools teach the history of the disability equality and rights movement, in the same way they do in terms of Emily Pankhurst and women's rights and Martin Luther King and the black civil rights movement."

However all agree that whatever

educational background disabled children come from in the future, the disability movement will always need people who can influence parliamentary legislation and are knowledgeable of the issues affecting disabled people.

"There is nothing there forever, so what you need is a body of organisations who can monitor and bring in new laws for new circumstances," says Massie.

"Many of the special schools I was talking about no longer exist. The danger is saying that everything has moved on and we don't need to do any more. And the biggest danger is the attitude of those that think it's over. We've still got a long battle ahead. And in that battle, we're going to need troops." ■

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# Strictly sign dancing

Deaf performer David Bower played Hugh Grant's brother in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* but **Kelly Mullan** finds he'd rather talk about his dance company and the disability arts movement than gossip about the celebrity connections he has built up through his film work

**H**ugh who? I'm not really his brother – I was acting," jokes David Bower, reluctant to cover old ground when there's exciting new work on the horizon.

But he does concede that it was a progressive move to cast a Deaf actor in *Four Weddings*. "The producers

thought it would slow down filming and cost too much but Richard Curtis pushed for a Deaf actor. It shows a certain maturity. We should see more of that in the film world but when it veers towards tokenism it lets down the quality of the material."

He still works as an actor but

David's real love is dance. He teamed up with his collaborator, disabled dancer Isolte Avila, 21 years ago, and developed a visual language mixing improvised dance, sign and film in a spirit of anarchy. Unlike other disability dance companies, they only use disabled choreographers. →



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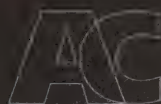
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Avila says: "Disability dance isn't athletic: we value even the small movements individual to each person. It's about expression."

"And," David adds, "it's poetry of form".

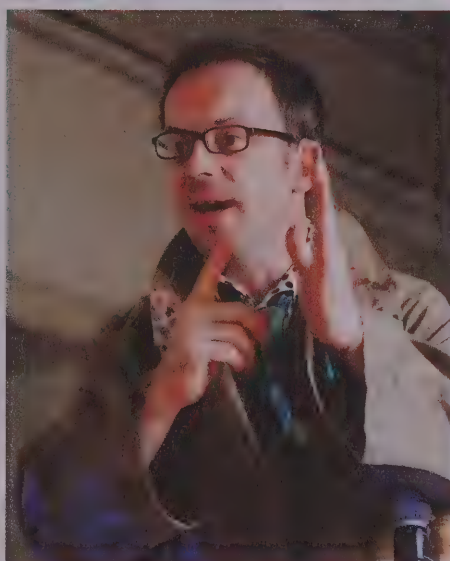
In a shopping centre café, sporting glasses held together with Sellotape, wearing scruffy jogging bottoms and looking like one of the more serious kids from *Fame*, David earnestly expounds the creative credo of Sign Dance Collective (SDC). He explains the idea of sculpting the space: each performance is adapted to suit the venue, so Sign Dance pieces are always works in progress.

**Choreography is a total sign language. The whole body is a brain and its language is dance: the full body physicality, the impact**

He says: "Oh God. I sound like a hippy. But it's a different language: a way of saying things with words that haven't been invented yet. Choreography is a total sign language. The whole body is a brain and its language is dance: the full body physicality, the impact. The whole body is thinking and experiencing, not just the head.

"I can't hear recorded music but live music is different. I can engage with it. Live music is not just an audio thing. A lot of Deaf people make that mistake but it's something that we can see and feel: it's a universal medium."

Avila says that musicians in workshops don't realise Bower is Deaf and remark on his musicality. She quotes an observation that David is a musician trapped in the





body of a Deaf man. He disagrees. "I don't feel trapped," he says.

He explains how he uses his impairment to enhance his performance and how this epitomises disability arts.

"I have tinnitus, so I hear constant sound and I use that in dance. My body is always communicating with me. Disability art is a conversation with your disability and [it's about] using it in creative ways. The disability art movement is investigating the creative potential disabilities suggest. It's not a ghetto for people who can't make it in the mainstream. It's a mistake to think that. It's avant-garde.

"The UK has a unique disability and Deaf arts movement: it's dynamic and fresh. Adam Reynolds [the disabled sculptor, who died in 2005] kick-

## The UK has a unique disability and Deaf arts movement: it's dynamic and fresh

started the disability arts movement and was a major inspiration for SDC. He was a mentor and a driving force and a guide. We miss him a lot but we want to carry on our work in the spirit he suggested. It's important that people don't forget what he and others achieved. We are able to do what we do today due to them."

David talks about "the disability arts movement" but then corrects himself for leaving out the word "Deaf" and explains his stand on the question of deafness as disability or culture. "Deaf

people are a language group with a distinctive culture but all disabilities are different and Deaf culture is not unique in the disabled community. We can have a dialogue and petition disabled artists to learn sign language, so we can have more interaction and more understanding."

Last month, David became the first Deaf actor to play Quasimodo for Graeae's adaptation of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* for BBC Radio 4. Proud of his performance, he says: "Quasimodo isn't a negative portrayal of a disabled person, he's an iconic archetype, he's everybody. He's honest, compassionate and loving. And it's very well adapted by two disabled scriptwriters."

Now plans are underway for SDC to tour in the spring. Their new



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tells me he has just seen a bin bag hanging out of a bin. "It looked sleepy and happy," he says. "I wanted to be that bin bag."

He has plans to take part in the cultural Olympiad and has aspirations to open the 2012 Paralympics. Inspired by some royal command disablist humour, he says: "Watching Prince Charles's birthday celebrations, I was shocked at the disablist rot that experienced comedians like Monty Python and Robin Williams were resorting to: making fun of the Paralympics. We should invite Monty Python to pretend to be disabled to open the London Paralympics, then we can come on and gaffer tape them into a cage for the duration of the Games. I think Prince Charles would enjoy that." ■

production *Three Films + One* has been two years in the making and is due to go on tour in the spring. One of the pieces, *Listen*, is based on David's experience of tinnitus and uses sound-wave technology to build a landscape.

SDC started combining film and live performance so larger audiences could see their signing but David says that film and choreography have evolved together over the past 100 years and they're tapping into a stylistic convention championed by Bertolt Brecht.

David relishes the chance to tour internationally and plans to return to festivals in Slovenia, Bangalore, Tunisia, Greece and Belfast. Although social isolation is a major theme of his work, the aspect

of travel that gives him the biggest kick is striking up conversations with strangers. His openness and frankness, he says, are part of his Welsh roots.

Like any artist worth his pinch of salt, David has his own way of looking at the world. When he comes back into the café after taking a breath of air, he

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# yourviews

## ASDA as you were

I was not surprised at Asda's response to Allan McKinnon's letter about disabled parking at Asda, (*Disability Now* December 2008, *Your Views*). The same has occurred at our local Asda. At first all went to plan but now we are back to "as you were". Offenders use someone else's badge or have no badge. Although Asda's scheme has operated for some time I've never seen anyone checking vehicles or heard of anyone being fined. It's not just Asda: the whole blue badge scheme is now in tatters.

**Michael D Higham,**  
Mansfield

I am disabled and often use the Asda store on Portrack Lane in Stockton-on-Tees. I was very pleased with Asda's statements about illegal parking. We



now have a new store with plenty of disabled bays and I usually find an available bay, though there are times when I have to wait for someone else to leave. The store has about 30 bays and even when some are vacant, about half the rest are used by drivers without the disabled badge on display. Quite often, disabled bays have vans in them and even trucks, and in most cases the drivers are not badge holders. Yet I have never

seen anyone being told to move or given a ticket, as Asda said it would do.

**Robert Taylor by email**

### Curbing enforcement

I am a blue badge holder and, as much as I object to misuse of the scheme I am unhappy about giving parking enforcement officers the power to confiscate badges. In my experience these officers are already little Hitlers and

more than once I have been in dispute with the authorities over a parking fine issued because the time clock had fallen down the demist duct or I had inadvertently displayed my badges the wrong way up. While parking enforcers view their job as maximising revenue from fines I am afraid that any extra powers will be abused.  
**Spencer Arnott,**  
**Homer Green, Bucks**

## The worst and the best about shopping

Before discovering the wonder of online shopping, (*Disability Now*, December 2008, *Basket Cases*) I used to buy a lot of clothes and household goods by mail order catalogue from GUS

(formerly Great Universal Stores). When I started to find its catalogue too heavy, I began using its website but more recently the site has got impossibly slow and the product descriptions aren't as comprehensive any more.

I don't do much "real" shopping any more as I find

the whole procedure too stressful and uncomfortable: the overhead lights in most of the big stores make me feel dizzy and disorientated.

One store I no longer enjoy visiting is Boots; I seem to spend almost as much time reversing my scooter as going forwards in the store,

as the aisles are too close together, and if there's a stock trolley in the way there is never enough room to get past it or to turn around.

But to me, the worst of the big stores for clutter is WHSmith, which always seems to have big cardboard display structures plonked



just anywhere. I tell the management about this but the clutter soon reappears: luckily none of it is too heavy so I've been known to mow a few of them out of my way!

I'd like to give a bouquet to Matalan for having the best equipped disabled changing room; Asda's is pretty good too.

I hated it when the big stores started introducing the new queuing system, where you have to weave your way around a maze to get to the cashier; but I now find that if you're in a wheelchair you're not expected to compete in the slalom:

you're allowed to bypass the queues and go straight to the cashier on the end. Wow! Finally I've found a perk to being "enwheeled"!

**Fiona Archer, by email**

### Give scooters access

It is impossible to access bus or train services on a mobility scooter. Everything is wheelchair accessible but there's been no thought to access for scooter users. The amended Disability Discrimination Act 2005 specifically excludes scooters from the transportation part of the act. I have contacted my MP, my local authority, the Welsh Assembly and the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee in London over this issue. I have now got a manual wheel-

chair, which means I can no longer travel independently. My carer, who is also my wife, now has to accompany me on any journey I wish to take. Due to progressing multiple sclerosis and weakness in my left arm, I am unable to wheel myself. As the age of this country's population continues to go up, so will the number of scooter users wishing to stay independently mobile.

**Andrew Price by email**

### Mind rejects entry and removal powers

The *No Secrets* review (*Disability Now* web story, November 2008) provides an opportunity to ensure everyone has a right to feel safe and out of harm's way. Health professionals, social workers and police need to work together to support swift action when there is evidence or a risk of abuse.

The review asks what swift action should look like. One suggestion is that where suspicion exists that abuse has occurred, social workers should have powers to enter homes and remove individuals to a place of safety.

Mind rejects such a move, which would blur the line between law enforcement and care provision. Research into the mental health system tells us that coercion reduces levels of trust and can damage therapeutic

relationships. Experience shows it disempowers and stigmatises service users by removing people's right to self-determination when they are able to make decisions for themselves.

Mind's response to the review will be informed by a large-scale consultation with our networks of people with direct experience of mental distress. We await responses before making recommendations, including on the issue of intervention and powers of entry.

At the same time, we urge the Government to learn the lessons of a long history of intervention in mental health and ensure that no new powers are created before the impact of existing powers is fully assessed.

**Anna Bird, Policy and Campaigns Manager, Social Inclusion and Rights team, Mind**

### Cold comfort on fuel

We hear a lot about the help the government is giving to pensioners with fuel bills. I am disabled and have been for the last 17 years but I never see any help with fuel bills and my heating has to be on all day. By the end of the year, I will be overdrawn

with the gas and the electric. Something must be done for disabled people under 60 before we are all up to our ears in debt: we are getting cold and bankrupt.

**Mr B C Turner, Tamworth, Staffordshire**

### Ways out of poverty

I read Les Harrison's letter (*Disability Now*, November 2008, *Your views*) about rising fuel costs and low income with concern. Mr and Mrs Harrison should immediately contact their local Citizens Advice Bureau, Age Concern or disability advice organisation to get advice about, and help with, claiming additional benefits, for example Disability Living Allowance (or Attendance Allowance, depending on their ages) because these are not means tested and do not affect means tested benefits. They should also ask about entitlement to financial help with fuel costs due to their age and impairments: the Warm Front Scheme, Cold Weather payments and help from energy providers.

**Judith McWhinney, Information Worker, Whitby Disablement Action Group**

### → Have your say

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## Our movement **needs** leaders

The disabled people's movement needs more than one figurehead, says **Andy Rickell**. Now it's time for our many talented leaders to start talking to each other

**T**he election of Barack Obama as a black and progressive US President has prompted two thoughts. Firstly, it brings to mind the speeches of Martin Luther King as the leader of the US black civil rights movement. Secondly, Obama's progressive manifesto for US disabled citizens talks about the US showing world leadership on disabled people's rights. The idea of rights movements needing leadership needs debating.

I have heard it said that the disabled people's movement is weak because it has no obvious leader. Let me challenge that assumption.

Firstly, the idea of the single leader is generally a myth. Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela were indeed leaders, but the movements they were part of had several leaders, some of whom disagreed fundamentally with them.

Secondly, to be an effective single leader, that person must utterly embody the issue that gives them the personal authority to lead. King and Mandela

came close as epitomes of their whole communities – clearly “black”, and emphasising universal rights and liberation.

**I have heard it said that the disabled people's movement is weak because it has no obvious leader. Let me challenge that assumption**

There is less common identity among disabled people, outside the six per cent of them who identify with the social model. To be an effective disabled leader, the person cannot rely on identity, and must concentrate on a message that speaks to all disabled people – universal rights and equality, not different services, needs or impairments. We need diverse leaders who can share this common message.

Thirdly, we need to unpick what a “leader” is. In my opinion, it is anyone who shows “leadership”. And leadership is surely about having the courage

to be first to challenge the status quo, to put principle and values ahead of personal reputation and advancement, and to speak up and speak out. This means that people in power and authority in the disability world aren't necessarily leaders, and equally just because someone has no formal position, they may still be a leader.

If we therefore ask ourselves whether the disabled people's movement needs leadership, the answer is a definite yes. The movement continues to need disabled people at all levels with the personal courage to champion disabled people's rights, even when it is personally difficult for them to do so. What then needs to happen is that those leaders get the support and training to have the skills with which to wield their leadership effectively, building alliances with other

disabled people at local and national level.

Do I think there are multiple leaders within the movement? Most definitely, and it has been my privilege to meet a large number of them operating at local and national level, particularly while at the British Council of Disabled People. Are our leaders being effective? I think there is room for some closer working between those people who are leaders, but true leaders of the movement have such commonality of purpose that, given the opportunity, we cooperate very well and to the same agenda.

Would we benefit from appointing a single figurehead? No, but it would be good to create a forum where leaders and leadership can build a more cohesive structure. Perhaps it's time for the key organisations to think how that might be done.

• Andy Rickell is a disability rights campaigner

### → Have your say

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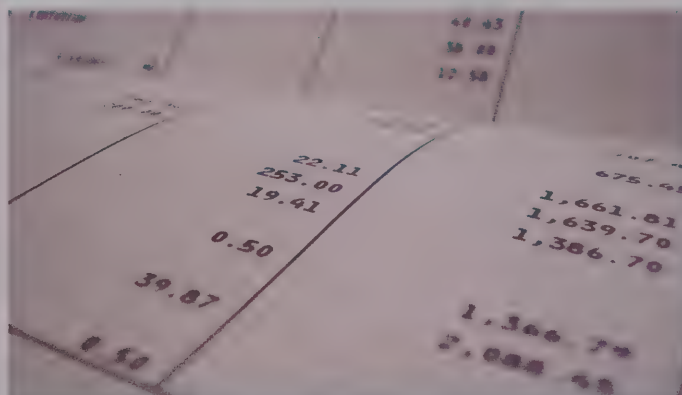
## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**Q** I am on disability living allowance and income support and am only allowed to work eight hours a week. I live in a privately-rented flat and have an awful credit record. I have been turned down for a £3,000 loan. My monthly income is £800 a month. I owe £2,000 and have a christening and a wedding coming up, so I need to put all my money in one lower monthly bill. But no-one will help me because of my history. I was a mess before but now I have my life sorted and even have a part-time job for as long as I want. Is there anyone I can turn to to get my loan?

**Miss D Plowman,**  
Skegness, Lincolnshire



**David Clarke:** It is great to hear you have worked hard to put your finances on a much surer footing. Your "awful" credit



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history and the slow-down in the provision of consumer lending will vastly reduce the number of lenders willing to refinance your debt and provide new debt over a longer repayment period. Although your income is apparently stable and secure, your credit record and the lack of any tangible assets such as a house means your request will probably continue to be declined by mainstream lenders. There may be some companies at the extreme end of the market who would agree to your request. However, this

would come at a considerable price and I would strongly recommend you do not pursue such a solution. Taking out new borrowing at this time could compromise your financial rehabilitation. Instead, I would suggest a two-pronged approach. Firstly, discuss your financial circumstances with your existing lenders (there are several companies who will do this for you). If they are responsible lenders, they will take your restructuring proposals seriously. Your relatively secure income

ought to persuade them to agree a more favourable repayment programme, as long as it is affordable. I would undertake this task yourself. However, if you use a company to handle these negotiations on your behalf, agree fees in advance (which should be modest) and ensure the agreements they reach do not further damage your credit history. This should free up surplus cash which, over a few months, will make a contribution to the christening and wedding expenses. Secondly, I would produce a thorough monthly income and expenditure budget showing essential versus non-essential items. This will also be useful for your lenders on point one. You may have to make temporary sacrifices, which will also make a contribution to the christening and wedding expenses. If you follow this advice I hope you will pull together enough

## THE EXPERTS

Answering questions on **Relationships** is **Simon Parritt**, a counselling psychologist who has studied psychosexual therapy. Simon was the only disabled director of the former Association to Aid the Sexual and Personal

**Relationships of People with a Disability (SPOD)**. We have two **Legal** experts on our panel. **Eleanor Williams** is an employment lawyer specialising in discrimination at Darwin Gray solicitors. Disabled herself, Eleanor lectures

widely and holds a number of advisory positions. **Douglas Joy** is the senior solicitor at the Disability Law Service and is blind. He started working in community care and mental health law in 2002. Other **Benefits** and **Debt**

questions are answered by **Gary Martin**, who is welfare benefits supervisor at Walthamstow Citizens Advice Bureau. Our **Equipment** guru is **John Mandrak**, who is blind and has worked for nearly 25 years as a disability



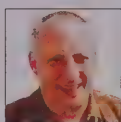
funds to fund the christening and wedding while not placing yourself in further financial jeopardy.

**Q** Five years ago, my 46-year-old, clean driving licence was revoked by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) because of alleged defective eyesight. The fields testing method had discovered faults. I was shocked at being banned and arranged an independent check by a driving school and was considered fit to drive by the instructor. DVLA rejected the report. I have exchanged nearly 100 letters with DVLA and although my eyesight passes the legal standard tests for driving, DVLA will not reissue my licence. Fields testing is uncomfortable and hit-and-miss, and works by blinking and using a whiteout effect when following a computer timed cycle. Testing by a driving examiner is far



fairer. DVLA will not permit a driving test, quoting fields testing and referring to expensive legal appeals. My wife is severely disabled and we are paying £15 an hour for carers to take her out in our converted car.

**William McCaffrey,  
Grange-over-Sands,  
Cumbria**



**Ed Passant:** I do understand that losing a licence can be extremely traumatic, particularly where you and/or your family are seriously affected by the impact on your mobility. But the DVLA has a responsibility to all road-users to decide who should hold a licence, and they have clear guidelines, particularly in relation to issues such as

vision. It isn't clear how the problem with your vision first came to their attention. All drivers have to inform them if they have a medical condition or disability that may affect their driving (failure to do so is a crime punishable by a fine of up to £1,000), but in certain circumstances, a GP or consultant may contact the DVLA directly and sometimes the police may make a referral after an incident. In your case, an ophthalmologist seems to have reported problems with your field of view and DVLA's drivers medical group (DMG), taking into account the medical information, has revoked your licence. You feel this decision has been taken in an arbitrary way because of your past driving record and the suggestion by a driving

instructor that you are still fit to drive. The DMG is usually very understanding of the need for mobility and if there is any element of doubt it will normally refer a driver for an assessment at a mobility centre to give a driver every chance to show they are fit to drive. Field of view issues can be extremely complicated and a driving instructor, or even an examiner, would not be remotely capable of assessing the issues adequately. A short driving test cannot possibly replicate all driving conditions or the unexpected events that can occur when driving. Any known visual problem needs to be assessed differently. You can appeal the DVLA decision at a magistrates court but I believe you would need the support of expert medical opinion.

#### → If you have a question for our panel

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journalist and consultant. He is an advisor on the Disabled Living Foundation's helpline. Answering questions on **Travel** is **Andy Wright**, who is disabled and is managing director of Accessible Travel, a

specialist tour operator providing holidays for people with mobility impairments. Our **Finance** expert is **David Clarke**, who is blind, has spent 14 years in banking and has worked for three leading financial service providers.

He is now a senior partner with Clydesdale Bank. **Kate Sheehan** answers your questions on **Property**. She is an independent occupational therapist with 20 years' experience and a passionate interest in housing. **Motoring**

questions are dealt with by **Ed Passant**, chief executive of the Forum of Mobility Centres, the umbrella body for 17 independent organisations which provide driver and passenger assessment for disabled people.



# competition

## BT accessible phone winners

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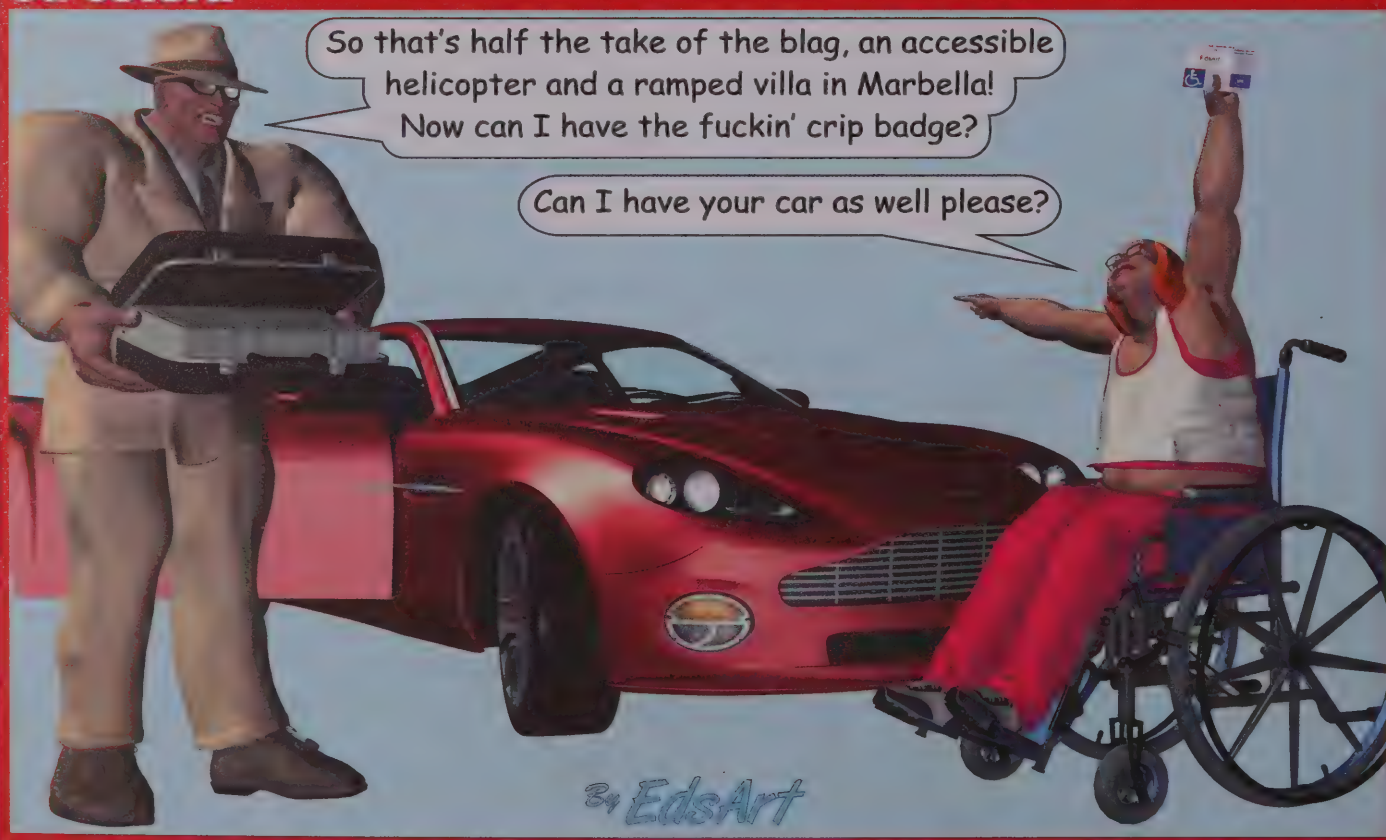
Congratulations go to Margaret Bievins, Uddingston; Ms Gillet, Brighton; Coral R Kallend, Sheffield; J Loxton, March; Robert A Hunter, Fife.



If you were not fortunate enough to be one of the five lucky winners this time, look out for more exciting *Disability Now* competitions in future issues.

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# guestcolumn



The psychiatric system is increasingly seen as an option for criminals trying to avoid jail. **Peter Beresford** says a social model of distress could be the answer

**M**ental health service-users are one of the biggest groups of disabled people, but how you come to be included in the category is a complex and frequently worrying business. BBC's recent *Horizon* programme, *How Mad Are You?* (above), offered confirmation of how hopeless even psychiatrists are at getting their diagnoses right. Yet psychiatric diagnoses continue to mushroom in numbers and impact. Children and older people are increasingly having diagnoses attached and drugs prescribed. More and more social issues are being reinterpreted in psychiatric terms, from difficulties at school to community breakdown.

But there's a real irony here. Mental health service-users in need of support

frequently report poor conditions, lack of safety, stigma and discrimination in the psychiatric system. So what's meant to be a helping hand at what can be terrible times may end up as an additional burden and trial.

Yet psychiatry can offer an easy option for criminal behaviour. With the increasing "psychiatrification" of social problems in society, bad is increasingly equated with mad. Violent and abusive behaviour is reconceived as "mental disorder", not least by offenders and their defence counsel seeking less punitive alternatives to the criminal justice system.

The effect is the increasing association of mental health service-users and distress with violence and abuse. We have seen this with child sexual abuse being treated as a psychiatric disorder and

in appalling cases like the murderer Ian Huntley, with defendants trying to use unevidenced mental health problems to avoid the penal system. This is different from those terrible cases where mental health service-users have known something was going wrong, have sought help and it hasn't been provided in time to avoid a death or a tragedy.

All this raises some very difficult questions, such as how we can challenge this inappropriate coupling of violence and distress. But we also need to acknowledge cases where there may be complex overlaps, not least with the large number of mental health service-users

who end up in prisons.

There are no easy answers. First, though, we need to raise these questions in a constructive and honest way, and recognise that there may be complicated and difficult answers. We may need to do much more to challenge the dominant, medically-based psychiatric thinking.

Psychiatry still seems to be getting things wrong. First, with people needing support, it over-focuses on the individual and fails adequately to address the social issues impacting on them – the barriers, material disadvantage and discrimination. We could really do with a social model of distress here. Second, psychiatry is increasingly extending its empire into the social world, without recognising the limitations of an individualistic and medically-based approach. We really need to hear from mental health service-users about these issues.

• **Peter Beresford** is professor of social policy at Brunel University, chair of Shaping Our Lives, the national user network, and a long-term user of mental health services

## → Have your say

- write to us **Disability Now**, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW
- email us [editor@disabilitynow.org.uk](mailto:editor@disabilitynow.org.uk)
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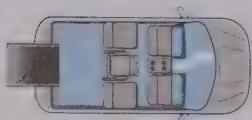
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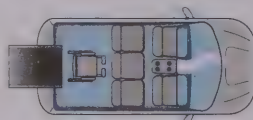
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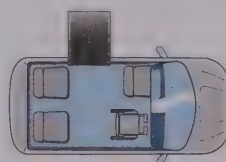
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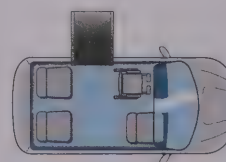
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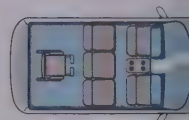
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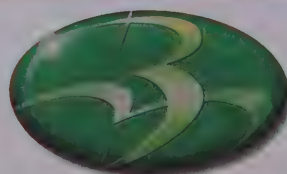
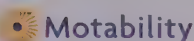
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# upclose&personal



## Parent power

**Sabina Iqbal** has won awards for empowering Deaf parents. She says every barrier can be overcome

**A**s a Deaf parent, accessing services was the biggest barrier. Fortunately, several years before I first became pregnant, I had founded Deaf Parenting UK, which aims to empower and support Deaf parents in accessing information and services.

Two years later, I wrote *Pregnancy and Birth – a Guide for Deaf Women\**, the first book in the world

to be targeted towards Deaf parents.

While researching the book, I met many Deaf parents, and this helped a lot when I became pregnant myself. As a result, I was more confident in approaching health professionals and exercising my right to have a British Sign Language (BSL)-interpreter at my antenatal appointments.

My husband, Asif, is also a Deaf BSL-user, so I felt it was

vital to have an interpreter at the birth to enable him to communicate with the staff in case anything happened. The birthing centre was very supportive and Deaf aware, mostly because I made an extra effort to meet them before the labour. I explained my needs, and gave my midwife a copy of my book.

We use BSL at home with Samaira (left), while our families use Urdu and English. Being tri-lingual could be confusing for her (she is hearing) so we thought it was vital for her to start nursery early (at ten months) to help her language development.

Unfortunately, social services refused to help with funding as they said she was managing well, so we paid for her to attend nursery, and our instinct was right – her language development soared, and she loves it.

The staff were fantastic. We were their first Deaf parents and some of them are learning BSL. We are now introducing Areeb (eight months old, *above right*) to the nursery.

As Samaira (now two-and-a-half) has no sense of danger, particularly around road safety, we use a wrist strap when we go for a walk. At times, she wriggles free and it sometimes takes a few seconds to realise she has gone. To her it is a funny game, but for us it



can be stressful.

Being Deaf, we cannot hear our babies cry, but we tune in visually, seeing if they are upset, happy, sad or tired, and that usually works, although it took time to get used to each baby.

We have two vibrating pagers, one for each baby, which tell us when each of them is crying (they also connect to the doorbell, telephone and fire alarm). I understand there is a new pager which can be used for

**We cannot hear our babies cry, but we tune in visually, seeing if they are upset, happy, sad or tired**

two babies, with different vibrating tones for each child.

While our experiences have been positive, this doesn't mean we won't encounter barriers in the future. But, so far, we have been able to interact with our children in a loving, stable environment.

\* Published by Forest Books and available at £14.99 from [www.forestbooks.com](http://www.forestbooks.com)



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# Sweet charity

With the high street feeling the economic winter chill, **Lara Masters** (pictured, below left) discovers that you don't need to spend a million bucks to look a million bucks

If, like me, you think you have a unique sense of style and are a little bit edgy and eclectic, then clothes shopping in charity shops is perfect for you. I checked out around 20 charity stores round London for this piece and in every one there were several garments that screamed Sarah Jessica Parker in *Sex and the City*.

The main problem with buying clothes in charity stores is finding something you like that happens to be in your size. I'm a size six so have problems finding things that fit me even in high street stores. If you're a more average size (12-16) there's much more choice but you have to be patient and sift through all the racks if you want to bag a bargain while curing cancer and heart-disease.

However, I bumped into charity-shop addict Jessica Kellgren-Hayes (pictured, right) and she was flaunting one of her many charity-shop finds: a stunning ruby-red silk dress (£20 from Tenovus cancer charity, Gloucester Road, Bristol). Jess has a wardrobe full of clothes, many of them designer, that she has picked up from the charity stores that she frequents and her tip was that university towns often have many smaller-sized clothes, as well as a glut of gowns from end-of-year dances in their charity shops.

As for access, charity

shops are usually cramped inside, which is not great for wheelchair users, but I found the staff attentive, particularly when I had become attached to half the shop and was dragging it around with me.

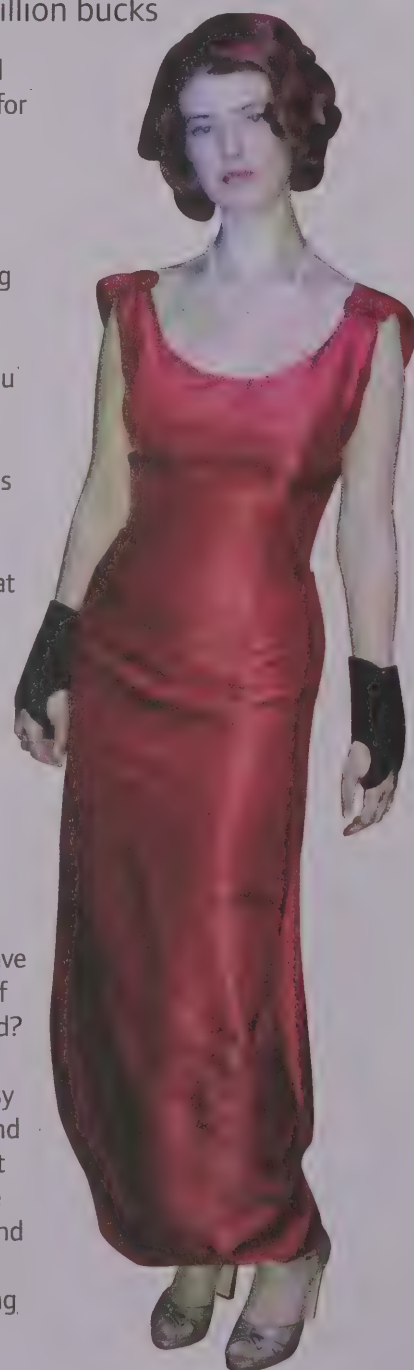
If you haven't been to a charity shop in a while, you might be surprised to find that prices aren't quite as low as expected, but this is largely because we are now used to buying ridiculously cheap goods at places like Primark and Asda, where we can find an entire outfit including shoes for under £20.

My silver lurex tube skirt was a whopping £6.99 (Marie Curie, Ladbroke Grove); it would have cost less new from Hennes but will Hennes look after me when I'm 106 and don't have quite as much in the way of charm or teeth as I once did?

Ultimately, shopping in charity stores is not as easy as high street shopping and takes some dedication but what you get in return are clothes that are original and the priceless feeling that your precious buck is going to a good cause.



TABITHA PRICE





# localknowledge

## Looking for a life on the open road

The only thing holding Mary Laver back from taking full advantage of her powerchair is a lack of support. So, she tells **Sunil Peck**, she's now setting up a club to find like-minded enthusiasts

**M**ary Laver would love to get out of the house more. She is desperate to go for 20 or 30 mile rides in the countryside in her powerchair or, as she puts it, "burn some rubber". But, she says, a lack of support is holding her back.

So she has decided to set up a club for like-minded people who use powerchairs, scooters and trikes and want to enjoy the great outdoors, but need back-up to do that.

Ultimately, she wants to try Land's End to John O'Groats, or even Perth to Sydney.

As she says: "If you break down on your own, how the hell do you get home?"

**It is like comparing an old banger to driving a Formula One racing car**

Mary is convinced there are others who feel the same way, because she sees people in powerchairs near her home in Newcastle all the time.

"We have something up here called the Wagon Way. I don't know much about it



**Off-road: Mary with one of her PAs, Emmanuelle Jacquesson**

but it is off-road and wheelchair-friendly. But say I am going down there and I get a flat battery or my tyre bursts. I am stuck! But if a group of us went down there we would have the back-up to get people out if anything went wrong."

Mary says her ideal outing would consist of around 15 other people.

"Some people would be in powerchairs, some on scooters, someone driving a van ahead. We would have a generator so we could all stop for a beer and a sandwich and charge our batteries up."

She can reach speeds of

around eight miles an hour in her powerchair and says the sensation is exhilarating compared with travelling in her NHS wheelchair.

"It is like comparing an old banger to driving a Formula One racing car," she says.

She came up with the idea for a club after she was forced to abandon an attempt to travel from Land's End to John

O'Groats in her powerchair on the first day because her support team was too small.

"I ended up with just two carers and they could not do everything because we were living in a tent and they would have had to do the driving, the cooking, the washing-up. I realised that people like me can't do things like Land's End to John O'Groats unless they have family as backup."

Mary has set her sights on future trips to Cuba and Australia, but for now her priority is to get her club off the ground by the spring.

Anyone can join, providing they can operate a powerchair, scooter or trike.

Mary says the only limits to what the club could do would be members' imaginations. But her own suggestions already include powerchair football, dancing, and trips abroad.

• For more details, email Mary at [mary.laver.e2e@googlemail.com](mailto:mary.laver.e2e@googlemail.com)

### → CONTACT US

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# Hungary

## for more

When **Cathy Reay** wanted a weekend of culture, beauty and history, she headed for the historic city of Budapest

**W**hen I arranged a weekend break in Budapest, I did so without any knowledge of the following: cultural history, local delicacies or even, I'm ashamed to admit, the native language.

As we soared towards our destination, I opened my guide to the Hungarian capital only to learn that I should not have changed my money into Euros (they don't switch until 2010) and that I should definitely have brought my swimsuit to visit one of their many magnificent outdoor baths. Not a great start, then.

With less than ten million

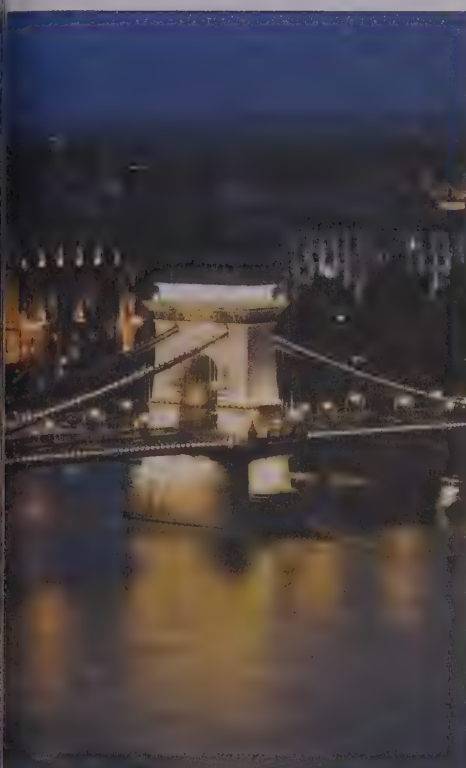
inhabitants and landlocked by seven other countries, Hungary is often overlooked by tourists in favour of warmer climates further south. Though the weather is quite British, the unique picturesque landscapes, nightlife buzz

**A crowd of people started shouting at me and then in turn wrestled for my luggage. I considered my options for self-defence before realising that they were actually trying to help**

and fantastic architecture give it a distinctive history separate from surrounding European destinations.

Our journey to Budapest was relatively painless, although the initial Hungarian "reaction" to us, short-statured girls awkwardly lugging huge suitcases across the city, was unusual. At a metro station on our route, facing the battle up the long staircase to the train platform, a crowd of people started shouting at me and then in turn wrestled for my luggage. I considered my options for self-defence before realising that they were actually trying to help (a very different story to three hours earlier, when angry Londoners cursed me as





FESUS ROBERT



**Far left, stunning views along the Danube. Left, the funicular: a popular ride, but inaccessible. Above, the Hungarian parliament building. Below, Cathy consults her guidebook**

they stumbled over my case).

Most of the metro stations in Budapest are situated beneath crossroads, and the only access option is steep steps down from the roadside. I didn't carry much luggage with me for the rest of the weekend.

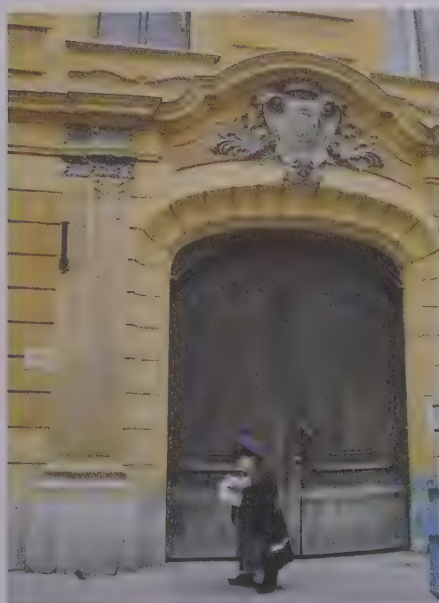
Situated on the fourth level of a huge, decrepit building with marble floors and heavy wooden doors, our rented studio apartment just outside the Pest part of the city looked like the perfect place for a murder mystery. The coffin-esque lift up to the fourth floor, which illustrated the building's age in its slow, creaking movements, wasn't big enough for a wheelchair.

The flat's facilities were at a perfect low height for me and my companion, Ivy (who used to work for *Disability Now*). Location-wise, it was streets away from the busy tourist areas of Pest but within walking distance of most places we wanted to visit, with a

popular street of restaurants just around the corner.

After settling in, we wandered around to the street behind and ordered our first Hungarian meal. My choice sounded great, a chicken and vegetable dish, but in fact resembled a Bernard Matthews Kiev and was served with fries.

It soon became obvious that Hungarians tend to stay away from anything that looks like it was dug up from a field or attached to a tree. On



## Did you know?

Budapest is divided into two parts, Buda and Pest, situated either side of the Danube. Buda is the older, more historic part of the city.

our second day, we tried to find a grocer to stock up on the fruit we were missing, but most of what we came across was mouldy and battered. At the other end of the spectrum, there is limited cheap takeaway food, which may well be the saving grace for the obesity of Budapest's inhabitants. Oh, and make sure you double-check when trying to buy milk in Hungary – more often than not, it's yoghurt in a carton.

Design highlights of the city are the Royal Palace and National Museum on Castle Hill, which slopes down to the beautiful Danube river. Surrounded by ancient buildings owned by various trusts and embassies, the area is surprisingly quiet and undisturbed. The funicular is a popular ride up and down the hill, but those under five feet frustratingly can't appreciate the sights, as the viewing windows are impossibly high. It's definitely not accessible to wheelchair-users.

Beneath Castle Hill is Budapest's Labyrinth, a maze of cavernous rooms with ancient etchings and mummy-like figures. It's a tricky lair to enter, owing to huge, uneven and steep steps that lead down below the ground. But if you can get there it's worth the trip. ➔



Dear Gordon Brown,

## **Make full human rights for disabled people your New Year's resolution for 2009**

The Government has set itself the ambitious target of achieving equal rights and opportunities for disabled people in the UK by 2025. However, the recent announcement that they intend to ratify the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** with reservations, suggests this commitment is wavering.

Disabled people in the UK need their human rights respected as much as ever. Every day thousands of disabled people are still being denied basic rights such as equal educational opportunities, equal access to life-saving medical treatment and access to justice for crimes committed against them.

Until recently the UK has provided much-needed international leadership on disabled people's human rights. We urge you to reconsider your proposed reservations to the Convention, so that once again the UK can take its place at the forefront of the fight for dignity and justice for disabled people the world over.

Yours sincerely,

### **The United Nations Convention Campaign Coalition (UNCCC)**

The UNCCC is made up of the following organisations: Action on Disability and Development; The Alliance for Inclusive Education; Asian People with Disabilities Alliance; Capability Scotland; Centre for the Study on Inclusive Education; Centre on Human Rights for Disabled People; Changing Perspectives; Disability Action Northern Ireland; Disability Awareness in Action; Disability Equality in Education; EqualAbility; Equalities National Council; GADCIL; Group of Solicitors with Disabilities; IDEA; Inclusion Scotland; National Centre for Independent Living; Leonard Cheshire Disability; National Federation of the Blind; Preston DISC; RADAR; Scope; Spinal Injuries Association; The United Kingdom's Disabled People's Council; TreeHouse; London Autism Rights Movement; ESSAN; Glasgow Disability Alliance; SAMH.

## **Take action**

Write to Prime Minister Gordon Brown MP urging him to drop the remaining reservations to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Letters should be addressed to:

Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP,  
Prime Minister, 10 Downing  
Street, London SW1A 2AA

Alternatively, ask the Prime Minister a video question about the UN Convention on YouTube at:

<http://www.youtube.com/DowningSt>

## **For more information**

See our template 'no reservations' letter and read our UN Convention briefing at: [www.timetogetequal.org.uk/un](http://www.timetogetequal.org.uk/un)

Or contact the Scope campaigns hotline on:

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**Did you know?**

Hungary was founded in 896, making it one of the oldest countries in Europe.



**Fountain of youth: Ivy and Cathy enjoying one of Budapest's sculptures**

Very little light illuminates the walk, which makes it a lot scarier than it sounds, and Ivy found herself jumping and screaming a number of times!

To relax afterwards, there's a lovely little cafe called Ruszwurm Cukrászda, which is a short walk from the labyrinth in the Castle district. Not many places seem to do great cake or coffee in Budapest, which is probably why Ruszwurm is always so crowded; almost everyone has to wait before being seated.

That night we decided to hit the town. After discovering that the "only place to dance" had been demolished earlier in the year, we settled for Trafó Pince Bar Tango, a student haunt. Though we couldn't reach up to the bar, we eventually managed to order a shot of the traditional Hungarian drink, Zwack Unicum, a treacle-like liqueur that tasted of very strong aniseed-flavoured cough medicine. In other words, consume at your peril!

As the venue filled out, it became apparent that we had stumbled upon a gay night, as a woman approached us and asked what it felt like to be short lesbian tourists in her native city. We didn't know how to reply in Hungarian, so all we could do was smile and nod.

The Holocaust Museum, located in a

former synagogue, was the most accessible tourist attraction we found. For the equivalent of £5, you are taken on a fascinating multimedia exploration of the World War II genocide. Rare videos, interview footage, relics and personal accounts of the period grippingly retell the story. The National Museum, meanwhile, was a huge disappointment. There was no English description of its artefacts and everything was in glass cases, making the layout of the museum very boring. It is also very hard to access (lots of stairs throughout) and so large that it is exhausting to walk through.

Overall, accessibility in Budapest ranks alongside smaller British cities. It isn't quite up to London's standards, where at least the overground trains are, for the most part, fully accessible, but newer buildings like the Holocaust Museum and restaurant chains are transforming the way the country approaches those with physical impairments. But it's the old buildings that really show the history of this thriving metropolis and set the scene for what was and still is a vital European capital. Next time I think I'll just make sure to read up on some of the most basic Hungarian phrases – hopefully that way I'll at least be able to order a decent breakfast. ■

**Did you know?**

The richest mineral springs in Europe are in Budapest. When the Romans arrived in the city 2,000 years ago it's thought that they brought their bathing habits with them. Today there are 32 baths in Budapest alone and 1,500 in Hungary.

**OUR PICKS:****Where to stay:**

Kalvin Apartments, on Kalvin tér in the region of Pest, are cheap and clean all year round. You can book via their website: [www.kalvinapartments.com](http://www.kalvinapartments.com)

**Where to eat:**

For delicious cakes and coffee, try Ruszwurm Cukrászda. Take bus 16 from Moszkva tér or the funicular. Open 10am–7pm daily.

Traditional Hungarian dishes are cheap and cheerful at Árkád Vendéglő. Take the 47 or 49 train from Kalvin tér. Open 11am–11pm daily.

**What to do:**

Take the funicular up and down Castle Hill to visit the Palace and National Gallery. Nearest metro station: Sikló. Price: Ft 1,300 return (£4.20).

Go vintage shopping at Iguana. Take train 4 or 6 from Kalvin tér. Open 10am–7pm, Monday–Friday; 10am–2pm Saturday.

Visit the Holocaust Museum to learn about the role Hungary played in the traumatic events of World War II. Nearest metro station: Astoria. Price: Ft 1,500 (£4.80).

Dance and drink the night away at Trafó Pince Bar Tango. Nearest metro: Ferenc Körút/night bus 923. Open 6pm–4am daily. Admission: Ft 750 (£2.40).



# tried & tested

## Uphill struggle

Self-propulsion by levers means you no longer have to grip your wheelchair's wheels. That's cleaner – but does it work? **David Bourroughs** finds out

Having been an active wheelchair-user for over 15 years, I was given the opportunity to test what has been described as a revolutionary piece of equipment.

The NuDrive is a new lever-drive accessory aimed at providing more mobility to wheelchair-users, while reducing self-propelling by up to 40 per cent.

NuDrive has been designed to help you get around more easily – whether to the shops, at work or around the house.

When the idea of testing the NuDrive was put to me, I thought that anything that reduces the amount of self-propelling effort must be a good thing, particularly when you're told it will reduce the energy you need to get

up and down hills and slopes by almost half.

With NuDrive, you don't propel your chair by gripping the wheels; instead, you propel yourself forwards, backwards, left and right, as well as braking, simply by pushing and pulling the levers.

The NuDrive is fitted by a technician attaching two adapters, one to each wheel. Once the adapters are in place, the drive units (levers) can be easily attached to (and removed from) the centre of each wheel.

Once the levers are attached, you grip each handle and push forwards. To go left or right you pull the left or right lever in, which causes that side to brake, and push forwards on both levers. I found going forwards great and manoeuvring left and right quite easy. I was now ready to try a hill.

When going up and down hills you have to remember not to pull the levers in and activate the brake. I couldn't get to grips with this, as I have one arm that



is slightly stronger than the other. But with a lot more practice, I would have got used to it.

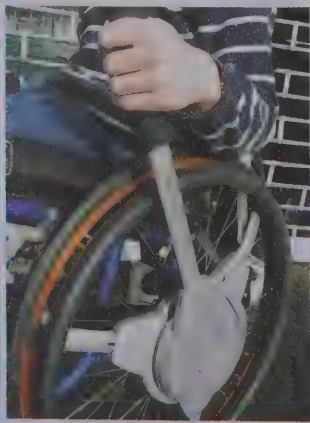
Going downhill was easier, although I remember thinking that I was using more energy than normal because I couldn't get used to the braking mechanism. I also felt that I was no longer in control and that the wheelchair was guiding me instead of the other way round.

The big test of getting back up the hill was tough, even though I was sure I wasn't holding the levers in, but I managed it in the end.

Because I have manual dexterity difficulties, I was

also unable to take the drive units off, because you have to use your thumb and push a button.

At nearly £350, this is a hefty amount for little reward. Yes, on the flat, it's great and it does improve hygiene. But going backwards and turning is difficult. If you struggle getting up and down hills, ask for a free, 21-day trial and test it out for yourself, but I won't be buying one any time soon.



JAMIE TROUNCE

### INFORMATION

The NuDrive costs £349. Visit [www.nu-drive.com](http://www.nu-drive.com) or tel 0845 0542 930





# Sussex Health Care

Sussex Health Care is an award winning group of care homes that were founded in 1985. Sussex Health Care now operate 16 care homes, predominantly in the West Sussex area, providing nearly 550 beds, incorporating specialist care provision as well as care for older people.

In 2008 the group are developing 2 new purpose built facilities: Beechcroft Care Centre, West Hoathly Road, East Grinstead and Horncastle Care Centre, Plawhatch Lane, Sharpthorne, East Grinstead

Beechcroft Care Centre, which opened in May 2008, is in East Grinstead and caters for twenty young people with physical disabilities and learning difficulties. Person-centered planning is at the forefront of our philosophy with the service users' needs and wishes at the centre of our service.

This care home provides specialist nursing care and is equipped with the latest technology aids to provide a safe, comfortable, homely environment for our service users. Beechcroft Care Centre is a specialist care home with twenty places for people with learning and/or physical disabilities. It offers superb purpose-built facilities with track hoisting throughout. Each single room is provided with en suite facilities. A swimming pool and spa pool are available to all service users along with sensory and physiotherapy rooms.



**Horncastle Care Centre, Plawhatch Lane, Sharpthorne, East Grinstead**

This service opened in October 2008. It provides a purpose built residential service with 24 hour nursing support for people with acquired brain injury and neurological conditions.

**Sussex Health Care operates the following award winning care homes:**

**BEECHCROFT CARE CENTRE** (Physically Disabled & Learning Difficulties) East Grinstead 01342 300499  
**BEECH LODGE** (Physically Disabled & Learning Difficulties), Horsham 01403 791725  
**CLEMSFOLD HOUSE** (EMI), Horsham 01403 790312  
**FOREST LODGE** (EMI) Nutley, Nr Uckfield 01825 712514  
**HORNCASTLE CARE CENTRE** (Acquired Brain Injury and Neurological Conditions) Sharpthorne 01342 813910  
**HORNCASTLE HOUSE** (Adult Care) Sharpthorne 01342 810219  
**KINGSMEAD CARE CENTRE** (Adult Care & Physically Disabled) Horsham 1403 265335  
**KINGSMEAD LODGE** (Physically Disabled & Learning Difficulties) Horsham 1403 211790

- **LONGFIELD MANOR** (Adult Care) Billingshurst 01403 786832
- **NORFOLK LODGE** (Learning Difficulties) Horsham 01403 218879
- **ORCHARD LODGE** (Physically Disabled & Learning Difficulties) Warnham 01403 242278
- **RAPKYNS CARE HOME** (Adult Care) Horsham 01403 265096
- **RAPKYNS CARE CENTRE** (Physically Disabled & Learning Difficulties), Horsham 01403 276756
- **UPPER MEAD** (Adult Care & Medical Conditions) Henfield 01273 492870
- **WHITE LODGE** (Learning Difficulties) Purley, Croydon 020 8763 2586
- **WISTERIA LODGE** (Physically Disabled & Learning Difficulties) Nutley, Nr. Uckfield 01825 714080

**For further information**

Please contact Corrine Wallace, Head of Operational Care Services. Tel: 01403 217338 • Fax: 01403 219842  
 email: [corrine.wallace@sussexhealthcare.org](mailto:corrine.wallace@sussexhealthcare.org)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE





## Treasured map



A government website provides information on blue badge spaces across the UK at the click of a mouse. Now it just needs some fine-tuning, says **Helen Smith**

I have to admit that my usual method of finding an accessible parking space is just to rely on luck.

However, having just experienced a parking nightmare in Oxford, I will never again leave parking to chance.

In Oxford, the streets are either so narrow that there is no space to park, or there are loading bans so you can't use your blue badge to park on the street. Had I planned my parking as carefully as my journey, I could have saved no end of strife.

For some time, I have known about the government's Directgov website, which has a map that allows you to find blue badge parking spaces in towns and cities across the UK. However, I had not taken the trouble to visit this website before. So to try and prevent any parking nightmares happening again, I decided it was time to test it out.

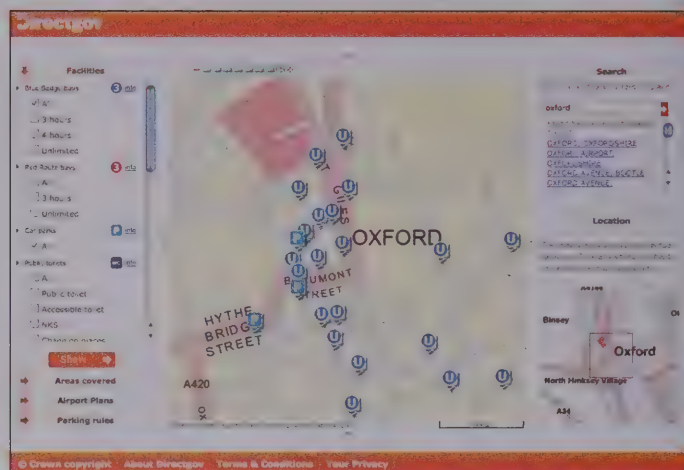
The easiest way to find the map is to visit

[www.direct.gov.uk/bluebadgemap](http://www.direct.gov.uk/bluebadgemap). If, like me, you try searching through the Directgov website, it can take quite some time to find.

To test out the map, I decided to search Oxford city centre for places to park, to see whether the map would have made my previous parking experience any easier.

**Had I planned my parking as carefully as my journey, I could have saved no end of strife**

The map was simple to use and all I had to do was type in "Oxford". I then clicked on the "facilities" button and ticked the box to choose "all parking spaces" and the map was instantly covered in symbols, each of which marked a parking space. There is also an option to choose parking for three hours, four hours, unlimited, or all three.



I'd been visiting the town hall in Oxford, but the map showed there weren't any spaces close enough for me to use. As an alternative, I selected "carparks", to see if any of these were any closer.

However, although the map told me where they were and how many bays they had, it didn't tell me if there were barriers into the carparks, or if I would have to use a payment machine, both of which would have made them inaccessible for me. With no bays nearby and not enough information about the carparks, my only option left was on-street parking. Unfortunately, the map couldn't tell me where there were double or single yellow lines.

I spoke to Ian Thomas, who works in the disabled persons' section at Directgov, and told him about the issues I had with the site – mainly that there just wasn't enough information.

He told me: "There are going to be some significant improvements. In the new year, we will be doing some user-testing to determine what improvements there need to be." One of these, he said, would be more information about carparks.

But this map isn't just about parking, it's about helping disabled people have better access and information.

Other options you can choose include finding an accessible loo, railway station and accessible beach.

So although the Blue Badge Map doesn't have all the information yet, it is certainly a good starting point and I will definitely use it again in the future.

• Helen Smith is director of policy and campaigns for the disabled motorists' charity Mobilise and is a member of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee





## At home on the road

The Vauxhall Zafira is one of the most popular MPVs. Ten years on from the launch of the first Zafira, **Paul Carter** discovers if it deserves its reputation

**C**hances are, if you've been out in the car today, you will have seen a Vauxhall Zafira. Since its launch in 1999, it has become one of the most popular "mass-market" MPVs in the country.

On the road, the Zafira didn't quite feel as comfortable as other vehicles in its class at lower speeds, with the ride overly stiff and slightly awkward. However, once it was allowed to pick up towards the upper ranges, the car seemed much more at home. The acceleration was definitely its biggest plus point, with the car offering plenty of power underfoot without feeling overbearing.

Responsiveness was also surprisingly sharp for a car of its size, while the brakes felt reassuringly solid.

Rear visibility could be better, with the "A-pillar" structure of the car creating

a large blind spot. This, combined with its relatively long rear-end, meant reverse parking required optimum concentration, especially in restricted spaces such as supermarket car parks.

Another bone of contention was the handbrake design. Rather than the traditional push button, the Zafira's handbrake resembles something that would be used to drive a tube train or fly an aircraft, and seemed to require almost herculean

strength to take off.

That aside, the Zafira represents a good choice in terms of accessibility. It was one of the first MPVs to introduce flexible seating, and so its variety of seven seat options provide versatility for both people and equipment. However, the back two seats are really only suited for children, and can't be adjusted.

As it borrows heavily from the chassis of the Astra, getting in and out of the Zafira remains as positive an

experience as it does with its smaller cousin. Both the front and rear sets of doors open up to a pleasingly wide angle, while the door sills are relatively low for a car of its size.

Unfortunately, the Zafira also adopts the same interior as the Astra, which, as was referred to in a previous *Road Test*, is one of the least attractive dashboards you could ever wish to see, with far too much plastic and a confusingly laid-out array of buttons and controls. However, the rest of the interior is bright and airy, with plenty of internal storage and highly-adjustable driver and passenger seat positions.

Although not without its drawbacks, there is a very clear reason why the Zafira is so ubiquitous among MPVs. It remains a reliable, decent, well-thought-out car that, although it may not be the greatest or most exciting on the market, provides very good value for money, even without the frills and spills.



The Vauxhall Zafira is available on the Motability scheme in a wide range of engine sizes and trim options. Prices range from an advance payment of £149 for the "Life" 1.6 petrol manual, to £2,599 for the 1.9 CDTi "Elite" diesel automatic.





## Winners and losers in Paralympic funding

The governing body for British Paralympic sport has had its funding slashed in the build-up to the 2012 Paralympic Games in London.

Funding for ParalympicsGB, the body

responsible for selecting, preparing and managing Britain's teams at the Games, has been cut by UK Sport from £4.29 million in the previous four years to just £1.86 million for the next four years, casting

doubt over the future of many initiatives.

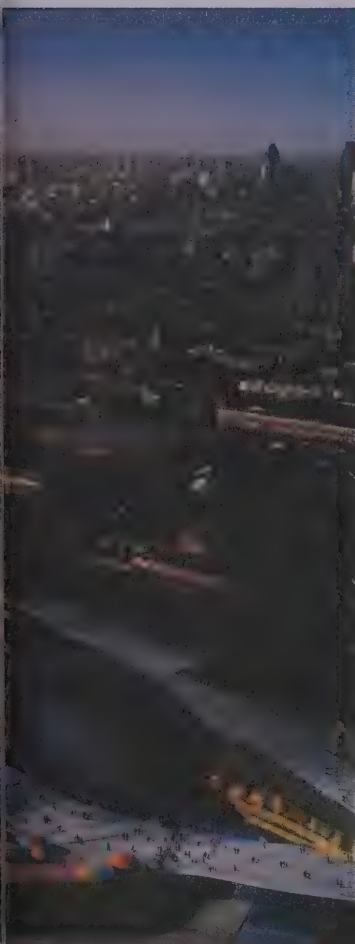
ParalympicsGB chief executive Phil Lane said that the reduction could now jeopardise Great Britain's ability to send a full team to the London

games in 2012, as much of the work in talent identification and development may have to be scrapped.

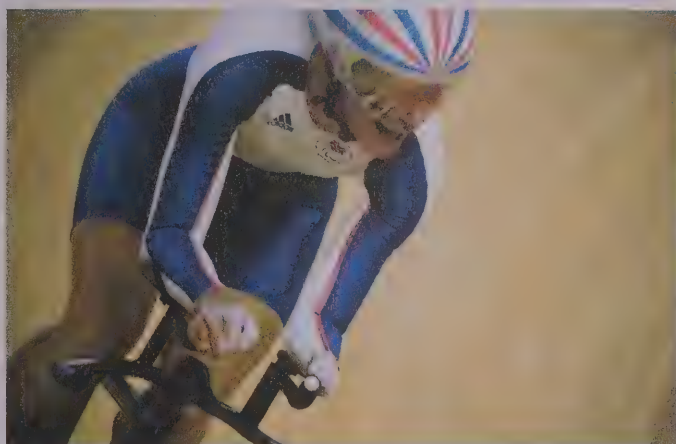
"Beijing was our best Games in a world of growing international



*Graham Thomas - England*



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© ROGER BOOL PHOTOGRAPHY

**Dave Roberts (top) and Sarah Storey (above)**

competition," said Lane. "We had a winning formula in two parts. Lottery funding to the sports doubled in the lead-up and ParalympicsGB maximised that investment, through delivering performance programmes with disability and multi-sport performance expertise. That last bit of the equation will now be missing in part.

"We had aspirations of sending a full team to the Games so that the home crowd had something to cheer at, at every venue,

which would have been important for ticket sales but would also have created a legacy of development from the Games. That may not happen now."

Elsewhere, there was good news for many of the sports that were successful in Beijing, with some seeing significant increases to their funding ahead of 2012.

Cycling, which brought home 17 medals from China, has had its funding boosted to just under £3.85m, an increase of almost 120 per cent from

the previous period, while swimming will receive £10m, equal to an increase of 45 per cent.

The biggest gains, though, were for boccia, which saw a dramatic rise of 285 per cent to £2.3m, and for shooting, which will receive 266 per cent more with £2.1m.

"There are some exceptionally positive elements," said Lane.

"A number of proven medal-winning sports have received a significant boost to their funding and I'm

sure that they will invest this well."

Despite the healthy increases, some sports now face the prospect of receiving little or no official monies in the run-up to the London games.

Fencing, goalball, volleyball and women's wheelchair basketball are yet to receive a confirmed figure for funding.

UK Sport, the body responsible for allocating funds said that those sports without allocations would have their levels revisited in January but that it was "committed to a basic level of funding for each through to 2012 from the remaining available budget."

Sue Campbell, chair of UK Sport, said: "We remain absolutely committed to all Olympic and Paralympic sports and will do everything we can to help get them to the start line in four years' time. We are sticking with the mission: we will not give up on anybody."

Culture secretary Andy Burnham said: "This is a good result for British Olympic and Paralympic sport and one that is realistic in a tough economic climate.

"It represents a record investment in elite sport – more than the Beijing cycle – and keeps our medal ambitions for London 2012 in place."



# artsreview



## Later...with Heavy Load

**Annie Makoff** checks out the band behind a campaign to keep disabled people up late

If you haven't heard of Heavy Load yet, you soon will. The thrash-punk band with high-energy vocals may be about to explode at a venue near you.

But Heavy Load is not just any punk band: it is a band with a mission. Its members met over 12 years ago at their Brighton care home with the help of support worker Mick Williams (guitarist and vocalist). But this gentle nature-lover and bird

watcher, together with guitarist and vocalist Jimmy Nichols, extrovert vocalist Simon Barker, quietly outspoken drummer Michael White and bassist Paul Richards – also a support worker, and a later arrival – all share the same ambition: to be really rock 'n' roll.

Fed up with having to play early gigs, the band is now at the centre of a new campaign, Stay Up Late, supported by Mencap and the MP Ivan Lewis.

"We are trying to encourage people with disabilities to stay out late," Michael White explains. They had noticed that people disappeared from their gigs early in the evening, when carers went off duty. "I was annoyed," he adds. "I thought, this is not fair. We want to stay out, we should be able to do this."

Stay Up Late aims to spread the message to carers and social workers that people being supported should have an active role in writing their rotas, and

that shifts should be made more flexible.

*Heavy Load*, the documentary, which has been shown nationwide since October, highlights some of the care system's failings as it follows the band in its quest for fame.

Paul Richards believes that the documentary helped raise the band's profile in the media and forced others to take it seriously, but he insists that describing themselves as a 'disabled punk band' is not a marketing gimmick. "We never formed as a social experiment," he says. "It is a statement about who we are."

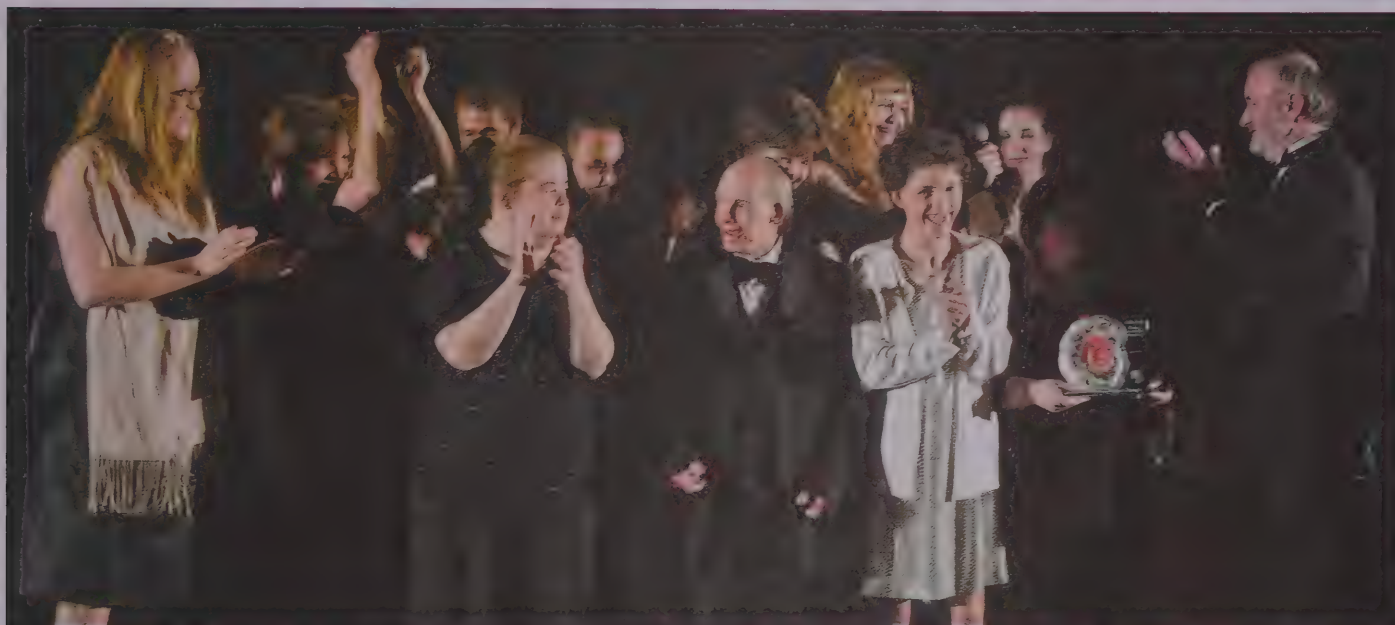
Others have been unable to see past the disabilities. "One guy said it would be nice for us to play to our friends," recalls Richards and remembers when they were asked to "turn it down": "You wouldn't ask The Who to turn it down!" he says.

But Heavy Load wants to bring about a shift in public perception of disability. As White says, "you are going to think the world of us." Maybe we already do.

• Heavy Load's track "Stay Up Late" is available now for download from [www.stayuplate.org](http://www.stayuplate.org)



## COMMUNITY ARTS



At the prestigious Deaf and Disability Arts Awards hosted by the North West Disability Arts Forum (soon to be renamed DaDa) the gong for Emerging Community Arts went to Blue Room, an arts programme for adults with learning disabilities at the Bluecoat arts centre in Liverpool, started in April 2008. Check out [www.dadahello.com](http://www.dadahello.com) for news on the other winners.

## FILM

**Special People**

The lives of young disabled people are a subject that is rarely depicted. So when a film comes along that tries to explore this topic, your hopes are raised.

*Special People*, directed by Justin Edgar is the story of a well-intentioned but pretentious filmmaker, Dominic Coleman, who wants to make a film looking at young disabled people.

He chooses a group of disabled people at their school and takes them out filming in the country but puts more effort into interpreting their lives, not

showing its reality.

That's a promising idea for a film, showing how disability is treated by non-disabled people. Unfortunately *Special People* does not live up to its promise. For example, the students are all wheelchair users, which reinforces the conventional image of disabled people. They are also all conventionally attractive, not challenging narrow stereotypes about body image.

The acting is sub-*Grange Hill*, with young people always being sullen and having an attitude. Edgar, the director, is so crass that



you wonder if he has actually been in the company of disabled people. His good intentions are meant to be ironic but there is a big leap between irony and idiocy.

The film has a poverty of imagination and ambition in other ways too. The young

people are types, not people: the over-protected girl, the pretty-but-intense girl, the geeky boy and the troubled teen whom we find is not actually disabled but only acting disabled so he can get the love he'd never had before. This is filming by cliché. The dénouement is particularly feeble.

There is certainly a film to be made depicting the lives of disabled adolescents but this is not it. And if you want to see the film, it is only on for one showing at one cinema in East London. So we have a film that's not worth seeing being seen by no one. What a result!

**Michael Shamash**



# worklife



## The golden bowl

Entrepreneur **Natalie Ellis** survived the *Dragons' Den* and now, she says, the only way is up

**T**he inspiration came from Shizza, our beloved miniature pincher.

On hot summer days, I used to carry her on my lap and give her water from my

hand at traffic lights. But when the lights changed, Shizza would jump around, wanting more water. I was eventually stopped by the police and threatened with arrest for dangerous driving.

As I did not want to go to jail, I decided to invent a non-spill water bowl that could also be used while travelling with your dog. It would keep the water clean and cool, and reduce spills and slobber. You would be able to kick it across the floor, or carry it across the kitchen without

spilling anything if you had a shaky hand.

After months of cutting up plastic and foam in my kitchen, I cracked it: the perfect water bowl. I started selling my invention at dog shows and to pet stores. The Road Refresher went on to win three awards, including Best British Product Development, and to be used by fire and rescue services and police dog-handlers.

This September came the BBC's *Dragons' Den*. This was a challenge in itself, but also the moment I decided I was no longer going to hide my impairment. I was looking for equity to help me expand into the United States. Although I was unsuccessful, we are now selling the Road Refresher in the UK, the US, Australia and Europe.

My TIA (transient ischaemic attack) happened four years ago at a trade show in Germany. I lost my memory for a couple of months, and was still affected many months later.

At the time, I was running a business selling pet

accessories. But now I could no longer turn on my computer because I had forgotten the password, I would lose concentration while talking, and would forget where I was while driving. I slept a lot and could no longer drive my 15-year-old daughter to school. My body had had enough and more or less shut down, and my company soon went into liquidation.

The following year, I decided to start another business, so I began knocking on doors to sell my Road Refresher bowl.

It was hard to start at the bottom again, particularly as a single mother, but I had to either stay where I was or start climbing the ladder.

My *Dragons' Den* experience turned out to be liberating. The TIA was no longer something I kept hidden away. Once I had got over my fear, the only way was forward.

Shizza passed away from old age in 2006, and is very much missed. But she left a legacy: the Road Refresher. \*[www.RoadRefresher.com](http://www.RoadRefresher.com)

### NATALIE ELLIS: CAREER PATH

- 1982 – left school at 15 with no qualifications
- 1982–1989 – tried jobs in several areas
- 1989 – gave birth to Leah
- 1999 – began working for myself
- 2003 – developed the

Road Refresher

- May 2004 – had TIA and was forced to stop work
- Oct 2005 – started working again but at slower and safer pace
- Sept 2008 – appeared on *Dragons' Den*





**FOR SALE** - Tel: 020 7619 7336, Fax: 020 7619 7331, Minicom: 020 7619 7332,  
email: [patrick.durhammatthews@disabilitynow.org.uk](mailto:patrick.durhammatthews@disabilitynow.org.uk)

### CARS/VANS/CARAVANS

**ELAP ROTATING CAR SEAT**, will suit Rover Montego or similar. In good condition, ready for collection or delivery possible. Any offers considered (all proceeds will go to charity). Tel: 01766 830265 (N. Wales) or email: [peter.jns@gmail.com](mailto:peter.jns@gmail.com)

### CHAIRMAN RENAULT

**KANGOO** 1.4, green, pas, auto, central locking, air con. With Gowrings wheelchair conversion incl light rear ramp and inertia belts. Carries 4 including wheelchair. Registered October 2002 (02 reg), only 18k miles, ex demo model, full MOT and fsh. £5,500 ono. Tel: 01932 242617 (Walton-on-Thames).

**TOYOTA PREVIA SPIRIT** 2.0, silver, diesel, registered 2006, 30k miles, air con, central locking, e/windows, privacy glass, 2 sun roofs, CD player, built-in navigation system. Automotive group conversion with electric winch, carries 6 inc wheel chair. Damaged to one rear panel which is reflected in price of £13,500 (which is trade price). Please Tel: 01784 713 143 or e-mail [tspirit@btinternet.com](mailto:tspirit@btinternet.com)

**FORD TRANSIT 2.5** auto, diesel, P.Reg. 12k. miles. Garnet Red. MOT November 2009. Steering Developments Conversion for disabled driver with Braun Radio controlled Rear Lift.. Pas & power braking. Hand & Foot controls. Electric handbrake, windows & mirrors. Tie-down for driver's Balder wheelchair - can be adapted. Passenger & driver's seat interchangeable. One careful owner £4,750. Fsh. Please tel. 020 8529 8636 (North East London) or e-mail: [davis.rowntree@googlemail.com](mailto:davis.rowntree@googlemail.com)

### CHRYSLER GRAND VOYAGER,

limited, diesel, auto, black, pas, e/windows and e/mirrors, 6 CD changer, air con, central locking, cruise control, reversing light sensors, twin sliding side doors, electric boot and black out windows. Turny Orbit front passenger seat. Only 35k miles, one owner from new and fsh. £19,750 ono. Tel: 01564 826429 (Solihull, W.Midlands) or email: [harkinconst@aol.com](mailto:harkinconst@aol.com)

### RENAULT KANGOO

**EXPRESSION** 1.6, auto, dark blue 21k miles, fsh, CD player, e/front windows and mirrors. Lewis Reed Wheelchair Conversion incl lightweight manual rear ramp with inertia belt, fold-down rear seats. Carries 3 including wheelchair or 5 without. £8,000 ono. Tel: 020 8444 7571 (Finchley, N London).

### RENAULT ESPACE RT-X

1998, 52,000 miles. Automatic, e/windows, central locking, air/con, Metallic blue. Carries 5 plus wheelchair. Gruau wheelchair conversion with rear access, electronic lowering suspension and inertia belts. Electronic swivel and height adjustable passenger seat. Current MOT/Tax. £4,500 ono. Tel: 07817 388962 (N. Ireland).

### CHAIRMAN RENAULT

**KANGOO** 1.6 with electric wheelchair, silver, auto, e/windows and e/mirrors, air con, central locking, CD player. With Gowrings Wheelchair Conversion incl lightweight rear ramp, winch and inertia belts. Carries 5 including wheelchair. 2007 (07 reg), 12k miles, fsh, £8,250 ono for car and wheelchair Tel: 01483 237644 (Guildford) or mob: 07917 696092 or email: [Pwatson1@aol.com](mailto:Pwatson1@aol.com)

**PEUGEOT 406LX X** reg (2000), 94k miles, remote central locking, air con, pas, CD player, metallic blue, with service history, e/windows and e/mirrors. Linford Chairlift by Autochair for front passenger and carries a maximum of seven people. In excellent condition, full MOT, asking only £2,500 ono. Tel: 01603 474465 (Norwich).

### VOLKSWAGEN SHARAN

**2.0GL**, auto, navy blue, 67k miles, 1999 (T reg), central locking, e/windows, pas, CD player. Automotive Group Wheelchair Conversion incl manual ramp at rear with inertia belts. Carries 6 including wheelchair. Only one owner from new, fsh, MOT expires Oct 09, £4,500/1,800 ono. Tel: 020 8541 4608 (Kingston-upon-Thames) or email: [daniele.haywood@virgin.net](mailto:daniele.haywood@virgin.net)

**VW SHARAN S** 2.00, petrol, auto, Y reg (2001), green, 65,800 miles, 3 owners MOT & tax until march 2009. Brotherwood conversion with high roof (59" internal headroom) 4 seats plus wheelchair (rear seats removable), rear ramp and 4 anchorage points, electric front windows. Fixed sun roof, pas, fsh, radio/cassette, central locking, air con. New battery just fitted, £5,200 ono. Tel 01225 834244 or mobile 07970 465689. Email: [ruth\\_bosgwyn@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ruth_bosgwyn@yahoo.co.uk)

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February published 26 January. Classified deadlines: Booking: 5 January. Copy: 7 January.

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We have been warned about a scam involving people from overseas who say they want to buy a product and who offer to pay using cheques, Western Union money transfers and certified cheques. Although no *Disability Now* readers to our knowledge have been hit by this, please be particularly wary of accepting cheques from overseas. For more information, visit the Metropolitan Police website.



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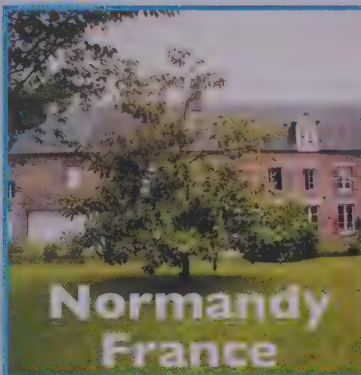
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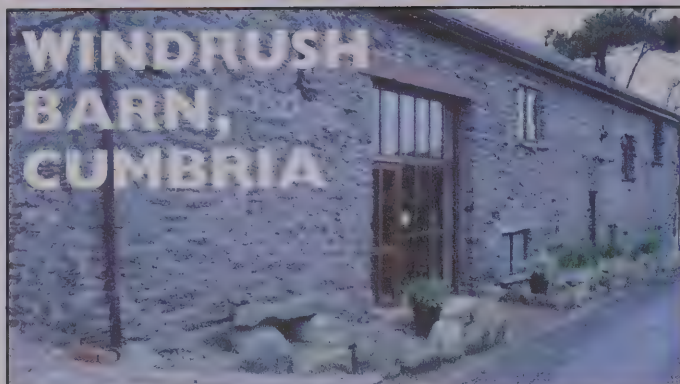
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[www.woodhead-cottage.co.uk](http://www.woodhead-cottage.co.uk)



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[www.higherlaityfarm.co.uk](http://www.higherlaityfarm.co.uk)

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Website: [www.lyneal-trust.org.uk](http://www.lyneal-trust.org.uk)

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# backlash



## Shoot! Why didn't I think of that?

At last, an American company has come up with a firearm specially designed for disabled gun-toters. **Paul Carter** is going to look for it at the chemist's

**N**ow, we here at *Disability Now* are used to receiving press releases and launch information about all kinds of new products, initiatives and schemes, usually falling somewhere between the categories of "actually quite useful" and "eye-itchingly pointless", with a

who may be able to get it on prescription" it said.

That's right, a gun. An accessible gun, to be precise. Available for free to anyone like me with an arm missing or perhaps a gammy hand. Greatest. Email. Ever.

The blurb on the manufacturer's website says that the "Palm

seniors, disabled or others who may have limited strength or manual dexterity. Using the thumb instead of the index finger for firing, it significantly reduces muzzle drift, one of the principal causes of inaccurate targeting. Point and shoot couldn't be easier." I have to say, muzzle drift has been a long-standing problem of mine.

Being able to reach things in the supermarket and open a jar of jam pale into insignificance

to the ole muzzle drift issue.

According to Sky News, Matthew Carmel, president of the wonderfully named Constitution Arms in New Jersey said: "It's something that they need to assist them in daily living." Seriously, this stuff just writes itself.

The best part about the

**"That's right, a gun. An accessible gun, to be precise"**

whole thing, though, is that the company is trying to get it approved in

America as a medical device. If it proves to be successful, it means that Americans might be able to get the gun on Medicaid.

By way of simple comparison, that would be like your local Jobcentre handing out chuffing great machetes to everyone on Incapacity Benefit. Come to think of it, that might actually be necessary if things carry on the way they are. Keep the hordes at bay.

Going for a job could end up becoming like some form of Battle Royale, where people have to fight to the death for a job cleaning the stale sugar from the empty pick 'n' mix trays at Woolworths. Except us disableds would of course get a head start by being given big bugger-off adapted weapons, while everyone else has to make do with a bin lid or an old kettle.

For now though, it looks like we'll have to queue up for jobs like everyone else, as sales of the Palm Pistol are restricted to domestic US citizens with a firearm licence. Only in America, eh?

ARTSEM MARTYSIUK

tendency towards the latter.

However, one email that came hurtling into my webosphere the other day made my inbox twang with slightly more excitement and anticipation than usual. Actually, scrap that. I nearly wet myself.

"A small arms manufacturer in the US is taking deposits for a gun specially designed for elderly and disabled people,

Pistol", which sounds disconcertingly like a 1990s portable computer, is an "ergonomically innovative single-shot double-action-only defensive firearm chambered in 9mm that may be fired using either hand without regard to orientation of the stock."

It gets better. Apparently it's suited for "home defence, concealed carry or as a backup gun". A backup gun!

"It is also ideal for





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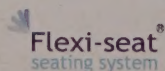
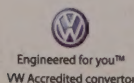
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